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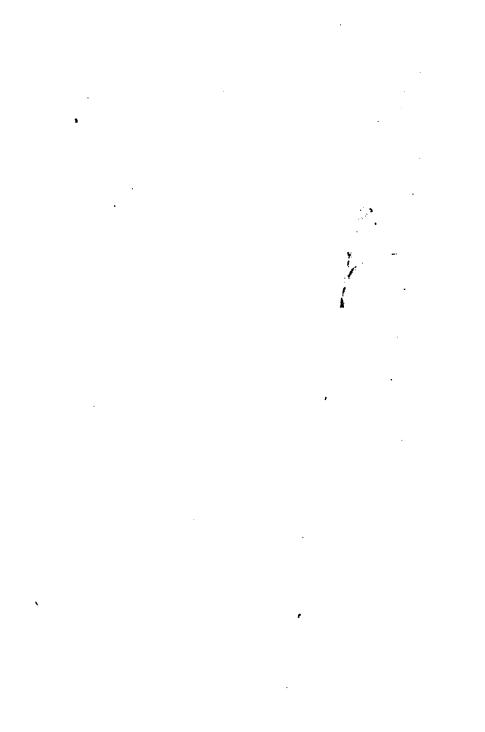
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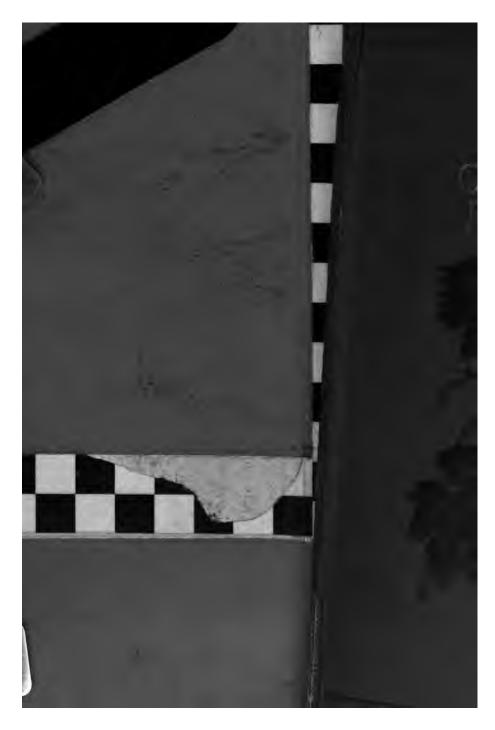
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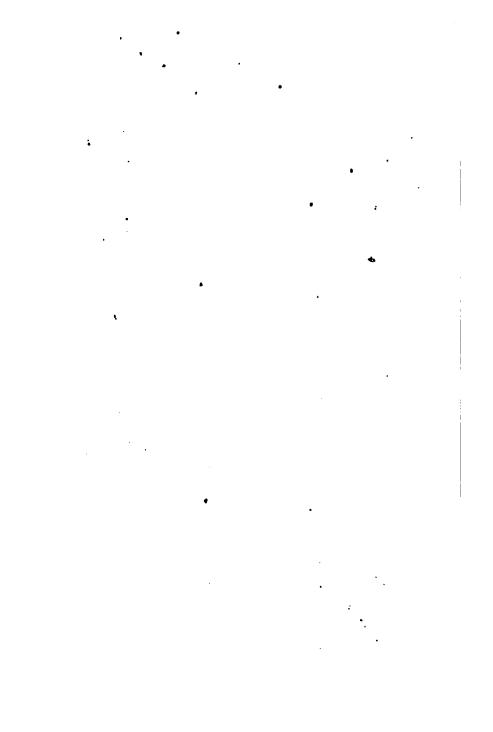




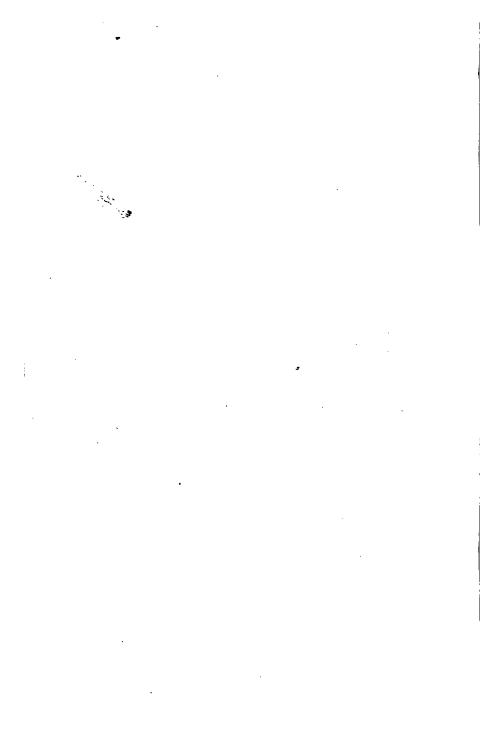
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much about the delicate flowers as about these grand old trees.'

The gardener near at hand smiled at this remark, and said:

'Indeed, you are right. I have known Him spend hours in trying to revive a sickly flower, which I should scarcely have thought worth the trouble; and one of my mates was sent miles for nothing on earth but to fetch a poor plant, which most of us thought good for nothing; but He had set His heart upon having it. It certainly was not beautiful to look at—a weed, I should have called it.* What! you want to see it? Well, I cannot show you that particular plant, for it has been transplanted long ago into the higher garden; but there are others like it here.'

'Then you cannot tell us what are your Master's favourite flowers? Surely, as you have known Him so long, you must have some idea?'

^{*} Acts viii. 26-40.

'Nay. He does not talk of favourites; belike He cares most for those that bear most fruit, that have the sweetest scent, or the most lovely flowers; but we cannot always understand Him nor His ways.* Do you see that vine that hangs from the terrace, with the rich purple clusters? what think you of it?'

'That I never saw anything so beautiful!' we both exclaimed with one breath.

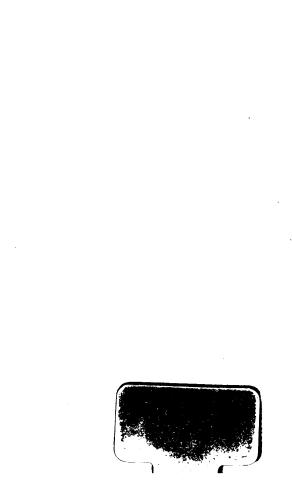
'Aye, indeed; but whether you can believe me or not, I assure you that my Master has done more to that vine than to any other in the garden. He prunes and prunes it, as if He would say, "It can be more fruitful yet;"† and you see what He has made it."

'Then it would seem that He takes a peculiar interest in it; otherwise He would let it alone.'

'So say I; but as I told you, we cannot always understand our Master's ways, and if He had left that vine to me, I should have

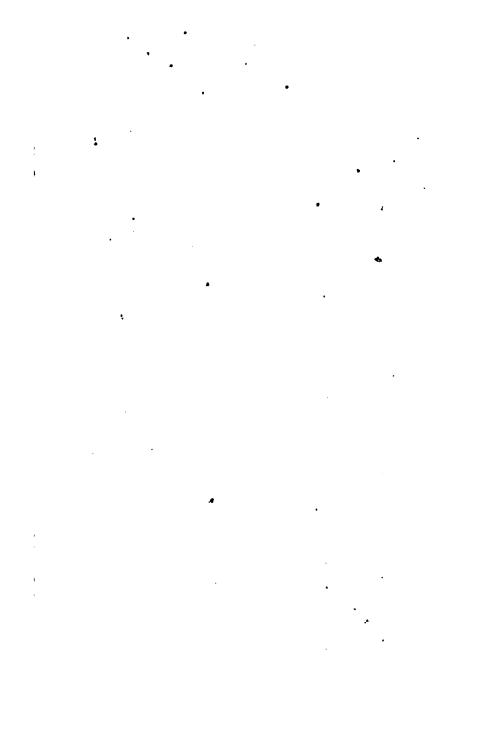
[#] Isa. lv. 8, 9.

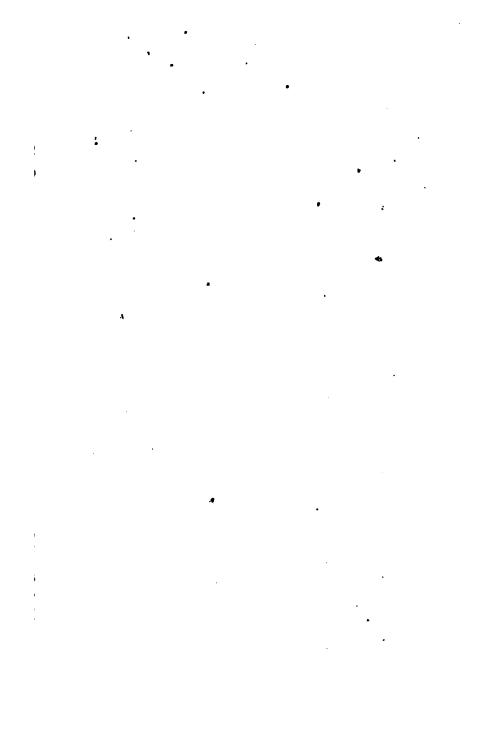
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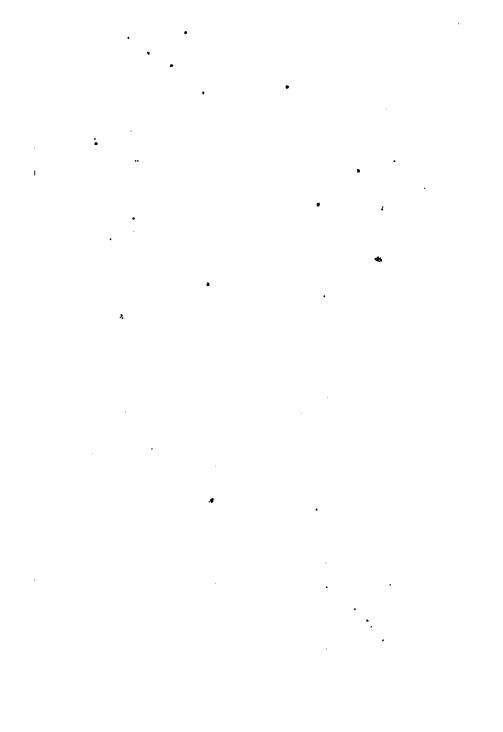
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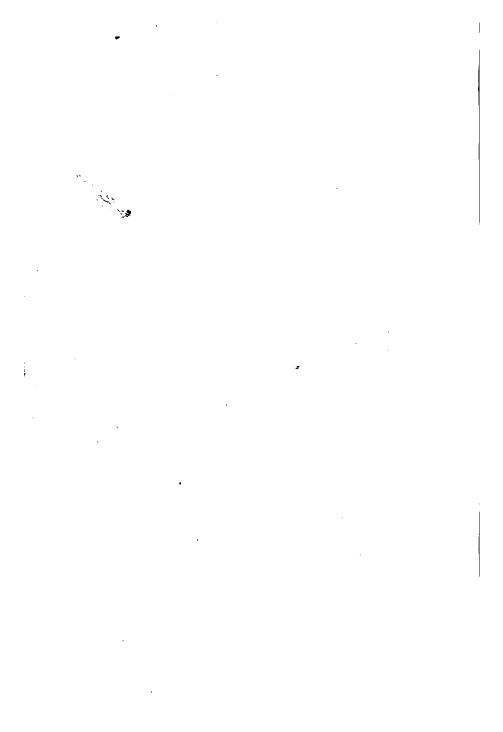




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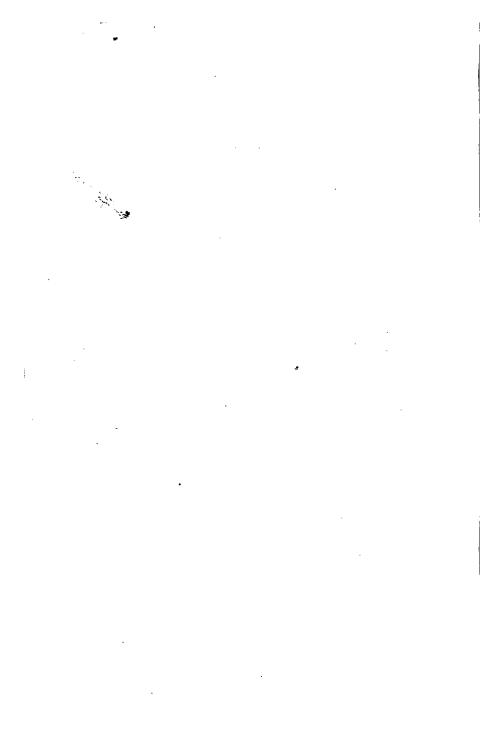


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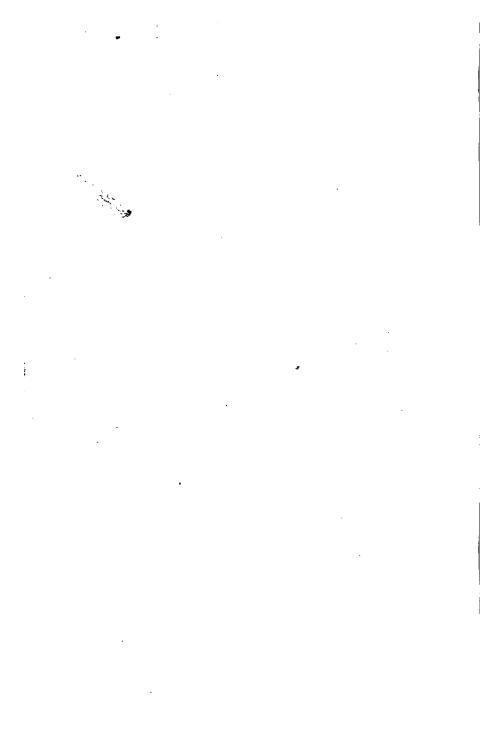
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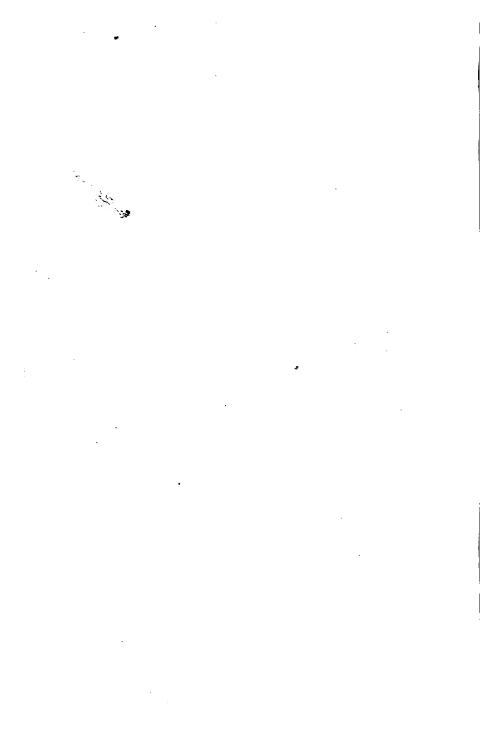


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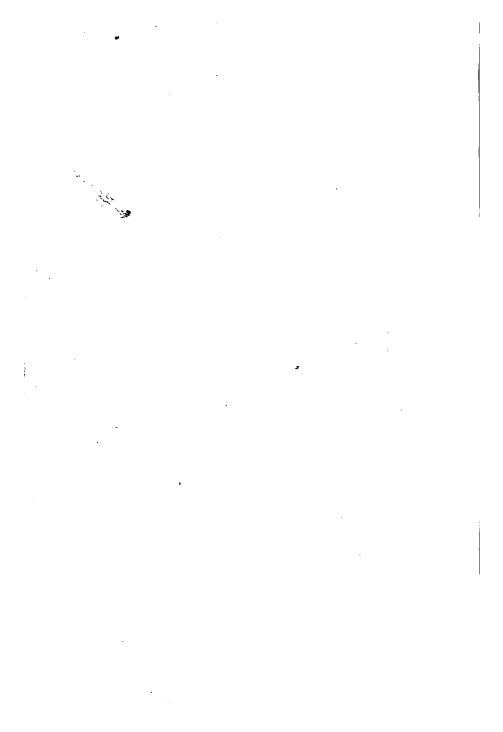
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trembled: each time a shadow fell across the floor he started and turned pale; and when the gloom of evening set in he could bear his terror no longer, but, more dead than alive, he crept from his house, and sought shelter in the depth of the rock which had been his refuge when he fled from the violence of the storm. There all was silence and stillness, a perfect calm, and the man felt safe once more.* He forgot to listen for coming footsteps, or to tremble at each breath of wind, his hidingplace was at once so strong and so secret; the darkness there had no terrors for him, for surely it would only make him more secure from pursuit. And by degrees his spirit grew at rest and peace; he ventured to uncover his face, which he had hidden in his cloak. and through the silence of the night he seemed to hear a voice saying:

'Fear not—faint not; one stronger than thine enemy hath met and vanquished him,

^{*} I Cor. xv. 55-57.

Henceforth thou hast nought to fear from him.'* And the man looked up at these glad tidings, and he believed and was no more afraid.

* S. John xi. 25, 26.

THE

HARD-HEARTED STEWARD.

It is a winter night; snow has been falling heavily, and now lies deep on the ground; a blustering wind is driving it hither and thither, heaping it up against the hedges, and making even the highway almost impassable. None who could keep indoors would set foot outside to-night. But battling with the wind, struggling through the snow, two weary travellers were fain to make their way homeward; their toilsome journey was unhappily only a type of what their life was—a conflict with difficulties, a battle with a rough cruel world.

But it is not with them that we are going to linger: our business is with one of whom both are thinking as they trudge along their snow-covered way, and of whom every now and then they speak:

'If only we had a few of the coals he is burning to-night,' says one; 'If only our roof were as water-tight as his,' says the other; and then for a while they tramp along in silence. But the sight of a brightly-lighted house again draws forth a complaint: 'To think of his warm room and many blankets, and of our poor children shivering at home!'

'And half-starved to boot,' added the husband, with something like a groan; and then they passed on in the darkness, and I heard no more.

Meanwhile, the person of whom they had been speaking was, as they had imagined, comfortably sheltered from snow and cold in his warm home.* He heard the wind whistling

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^{* 1} S. John iii. 17.

around his house, and making the old firtrees crack, and he stirred his fire and drew his chair closer; and as he leaned back and folded his arms, he remarked to himself that the season would be a severe one, and no doubt there would be a deal of complaining among the poor, such a discontented set of beings as they were. Well, if so, he would teach them not to bring their tormenting stories to him; he would show them how little he cared to hear about their miseries.*

And then he laughed a low chuckling laugh at the thought of how cleverly he had rid himself that day of a poor man who had come to him to beg that he would repair the roof of his cottage, which he said was in such a ruinous condition that the rain and snow made their way in as if there was no roof at all.

'I told him the Master would be coming before long, and I could give no orders just now. The Master indeed! it's little He

^{*} Prov. xvii. 5.

troubles himself about their tumble-down cottages; I may do as I like for aught He cares. And as to His coming, I, at least, don't expect Him just yet;* but it is the easiest way to silence them—they go away quite pleased and contented, thinking they'll have fine tales to tell Him of His steward when he comes. His steward indeed! it seems to me I'm pretty well master here now.'

So saying he crossed his legs, leaned back in his armchair, and soon fell into a doze, which wiled away the evening hours. No more thoughts of the complaints of his poorer neighbours troubled him; he had grown used to them, and for years past had been hardening his heart against them, until it had become as hard and cold as the stone walls of his house.† As he had said to himself, he had begun to forget that he was only a steward,‡ and to think of himself as lord and

^{* 2} S. Peter iii. 3, 4. † Prov. xxviii. 15. ‡ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

master of all the fair property around him. So many years had passed since he had been put in charge of the land, and so little had since been heard of the real owner of it all, that the steward had ceased to have any thoughts of pleasing Him, or of consulting His wishes even in matters of the greatest importance: in fact, there was but one person in the wide world whom he cared to please—and that was himself.* So while the snow lasted he stayed indoors and took care of his health; and when the cold was gone he said that he needed exercise, and went out hunting.

It was while riding after the hounds one day that his pleasure was suddenly and unpleasantly interrupted by a man who, with a long scythe in his hand, barred his way, and in savage tones ordered him to stop. He was little used to hear himself addressed so peremptorily; and had it not been for the

^{*} S. James v. 5.

menacing way in which his assailant brandished the scythe, he would have struck him with his riding-whip and ridden on his way. But for once in his life he was somewhat alarmed; and retreating to a safe distance, he let the man have his say.

It was not a new story, only piteous entreaties that long arrears of wages might be paid, mingled with threats of vengeance, bitter lamentations over starving children, and a dying wife who could have neither food nor medicine.* The steward had heard such tales so often that he scarcely listened, though he kept his eyes fixed on that threatening scythe, and gave apparent attention until the moment came when, by a sudden swerve, he could evade it, and pass at a safe distance from the desperate man. Then, with a brutal laugh of derision, he put spurs to his horse and soon left his assailant far behind.

And did he really care nothing? Nay, I

* Job xxiv. 7—10.

will not say that. At night some remembrances of the threats addressed to him were apt to recur to him unpleasantly; and it was with a sensation of relief that he heard a few days after that the sick wife had died, and that, distracted with his grief, the husband had become raving mad, and been carried off to an asylum.

- 'The best place for him!' was his response to his informant; but the man had growled out:
- 'Belike you'd say it was the best place for all of us; you're doing your best to send us there, with your mean ways, exacting full rent for houses that are tumbling down about our ears, and paying no man his due.* Aye, if only the Master knew!'

But the steward had passed on, turning a deaf ear to this wail of despair.

'Please, sir,' said a little child who had seen him passing, and had come to meet him, armed with a message from her mother,

^{*} S. James v. 4.

which the poor woman dared not speak herself, 'mother bid me tell you that grandfather's surely dying, the old man whom the Master loves so well; and please won't you let him have a bit of meat? he's that eager for it. Mother said if you'd only come and see him, she's sure you couldn't deny him.'

'Tell your mother I never give to beggars; it's my rule, and I never break it. If the Master loves the old man, no doubt He'll take good care of him.'

'But, sir, He bade you take care of the poor, we know He did; and surely, surely,' the child began to sob, 'none can be poorer than grandfather. You'll never miss it, sir—you never will. The Master will pay you back; I know He will.'

'Much you know about the Master, child. I tell you I never give to beggars. Now get you gone—get you gone.'*

He turned away, and the child sat down, in a perfect flood of tears, on the ground.

^{*} S. Matt. xxv. 45.

'Naughty, cruel man!' she sobbed. 'Oh that the Master would come His own self!'

Meanwhile, the steward turned homeward. Everything seemed to go wrong with him that day; in his own house he should be secure from such unpleasant incidents. So he thought; but again he was disappointed; not even at home was he to be undisturbed. A message had come for him, and this time it was a message he could not well disregard; it came not from some miserable suppliant asking relief, or from some injured creditor demanding payment, but from the Master, whom he had almost entirely forgotten, whose existence he had for years ignored, whose property he had so grossly neglected. It was but a short message, but the steward's hair seemed to stand on end as he heard it. was but to announce that the Master was coming to inspect His property; that He would meet His steward before long, though He did not say exactly when.*

^{*} Rev. xxii. 20.

For a few minutes the steward was inclined to doubt the message, to say it was a mistake, a forgery, or a trick of his enemies; but a few moments' consideration served to convince him that he had no ground for such notions, and that he had every reason to believe the message came direct from his Master Himself. He sat down, and leaning his head upon his hands, tried to face the He could see plainly enough, as plainly as if the scene was there before him, the arrival of the Master, the delight of the tenants; and he could imagine, yes, almost put into words, the many complaints they would pour forth of the steward's neglect and cruelty. Should he be able to brave it all? should he find it possible to deceive the Master and make him believe that these complaints were but idle or malicious tales? He had small hopes of any success in such an attempt; for were not proofs of his neglect to be found on every side: the sickly halfstarved poor, the ruined cottages, the untilled land-could his Master see these and not guess the reason why? No; of small avail would such an attempt prove.* How then could he escape the natural result of these discoveries—disgrace and dismissal? There was but one way, and his heart misgave him as he came to this conclusion. He must, ves, he certainly must set about doing the work he had so long neglected: the poor must be tended, his own farm must be set in order, the houses of the tenants must be repaired, and innumerable other tasks must be undertaken, which in the long years that were past had been utterly neglected. But how do all this if the Master would shortly arrive? 'Oh for time! for a little delay!' he moaned. 'How shall I ever accomplish a

And with that thought came another, to which the steward's heart had long been a

quarter of what needs to be done?"

^{*} Gal. vi. 7.

stranger. Can that cold-hearted, brutal man ever know such a feeling as this strange one which is now springing up within him? this sensation of pain, which yet is not altogether pain, which prompts him to cry out:*

'Oh, how much He trusted to me! why have I so forgotten Him?' There is a bitter pang in the thought, and yet there is some hope in it. 'He had once great regard for me; yes, I see now, He once loved me, and He has sent me this warning of His coming; is it possible He still has some hope of me?'t

That last thought made him start from his seat. The Master was coming; but when he did not know. Then there was still some time—little enough, doubtless, but still some time, and it must be used. Out he went, round his own premises; the Master would look first at them. Alas! alas! there was much, much to be done. Disorder reigned everywhere; what he had once called comfort,

^{*} S. John xvi. 8, 9 (marg.).

[†] Job xxii. 29.

he now saw plainly was nothing but slothful ease; what had formerly pleased his eye, now looked coarse and uncomely. Trying to see things as His Master would see them, made him dissatisfied as he had never been in his life before.

But more yet remained to be done. It was with a trembling heart he set about the work for which he knew well he should have to give account; trembling, because of the short time in which to do it; trembling, because he had made enemies of all around him, and was well-nigh afraid to venture among them. Still he set about it, clumsily, but heartily. And each day found him still striving to make up for lost time, often well-nigh hopelessly, for the mass of labour weighed him down, and the thought of the past wasted hours was ever in his mind.

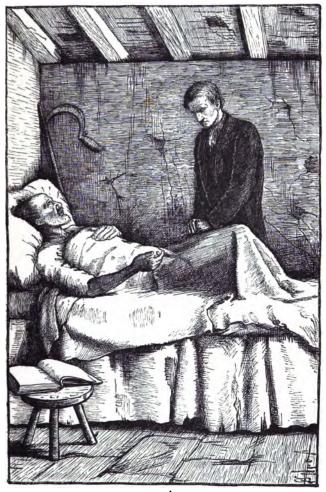
And until he set to work, he had but a faint idea how much there was to do. He had told himself, indeed, that there was more to do than he had any hope of being able to accomplish, and he had believed it with all his heart. But to plan what he would do, and to carry out those plans, were two very different things.

The farm which he had been supposed to manage entirely, on which he lived, he was well aware needed repair; but when he had looked over it more carefully, he had come to the conclusion that it must be well-nigh rebuilt, so much had it fallen into decay. Walls were rotting, gates had long fallen from their hinges; fences had been broken down, hedges had been long left untrimmed. It would be easy to put a few coats of paint over the dirty walls; but the steward knew that such devices would not serve to blind his master's eyes, and indeed the time had passed away when they would have satisfied himself.

The work must now be done in such a way that it would bear the searching scrutiny

of his Master's eye; for though the steward knew full well that at the best it would not be all that it should, still he would fain have it so done, that it should be honest work at least. And then outside his own farm. among 'the tenants entrusted by his Master to his care, many of whom were dear to his Master's heart for old acquaintance' sake, the steward found work to be done at every turn. There was scarce a cottage which he could pass, which did not remind him of some earnest request, often made and as often slighted; and as he entered one after another, and in humbler tones drew from the inhabitants the tale of their wants and sufferings, he could scarce believe that he had heard the same tales before, and turned away unmoved.

'The Master said He would never let me want,' pleaded a poor, bedridden old labourer, 'and I'd thought for certain He'd send me help through you; but I've waited many a



THE LABOURER'S PETITION.

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day, and it seems as if He must have quite forgotten His promise. Did He never send you a message about me all these years?'

'He did indeed,' said the steward, with bowed head, and eyes fixed on the floor; 'but I disregarded His orders, and cared nothing for His friends. But now I'm here, tell me what you need.'

The wants were few and simple: something to make the hard crust softer and more palatable; a blanket to make the poor limbs warmer; a patch on the thatch to keep out the rain. The steward listened and promised, and before the day closed that task was done, and done with kindly words that came from the very depths of a repentant heart—words that came warm to the heart, as the blanket to the paralyzed limbs.

'I know you've often told me it cannot be, sir, but if you only knew how sore pressed I've been this year past, you'd kindly wait a while longer for the rent,' said a pale, anxious-looking father, who was waiting at his door as the steward passed by.

He had indeed made the same request many times before, and nothing but despair would have driven him to attempt it again. The money was not in the house, and how could the rent be paid? Now the hopeless look forsook that careworn face, as in tones of kindly sympathy the steward inquired into the causes of this distress, and then lent a ready ear to the history of mistakes and failures which followed! To be able to speak freely, and pour out his woes, was such a relief; the weight seemed suddenly to vanish, and hope to revive—such hope as for years had never entered the poor labourer's breast; for one who had the power to help was listening -nay, more, was telling him of the Master's great goodness, and assuring him that all he asked should be granted. Days passed quickly away in this manner, and the steward, busy in his Master's work, became gradually

less and less afraid to look forward to his Master's coming. True, the burden of work to be done still almost crushed him beneath its weight; but he had left off thinking so much about the past, and the sad tale it could tell. The tenants were now his friends, won back by kind acts and deeds of unexpected favour. Little children no longer ran away when he approached; anxious mothers told him of their troubles, and found sympathy and help; fathers seeking work came to him, and were supplied, if the means to help were within his reach. And so time passed rapidly, and the appointed day came at last.

There was a stillness in the steward's house; news came that his Master was approaching, and he was waiting to receive him—not now in terror and alarm, though as he looked around him, he could see much that he would have liked to have done. But his fear of his Master was gone; he knew

Him to be his Friend. And lo! as He passed through the streets and lanes, the Master heard His steward's name on all men's lips.

- 'He came to me when I was sick,' said one.
- 'He brought me food when I was out of work, and well-nigh starved,' said another.
- 'He sent me clothes that cold hard winter, when I was perishing with cold, and the children were ill, and flannel was too dear to buy,' cried a third.
- 'And I was in trouble through my own sin, lonely and in prison, and he came and helped me, and brought me out,' was the thankful response of a fourth.*

And the Master's heart was glad.

^{*} Rev. xiv. 13.

THE LITTLE EXILE.

It was evening, a cloudy evening promising a stormy night. The sun had set among heavy clouds, and left the mountains behind which he sank wrapt in dark grey mist. The wind was beginning to howl in the deep pine forests, and the birds flew hither and thither as if they knew that some change was approaching. Men and women hurried home, glad to think that work was over, and they could seek shelter before the storm began. Weary-looking groups they were for the most part; only here and there was to be seen a bright face, or a glad smile.

But why this sadness? why these weary

footsteps? Look closer; each and all have that to carry which they would fain shake off and be quit of, for they work in chains, and every movement is hindered and clogged by the burden on the feet or hands.* Wonder no more at them, but follow and learn something of their history. There is an old man with white hair, and a little child by his side; they are entering their cottage home. The child is frightened at the coming storm, and pulls her grandfather hastily inside and shuts the door; but we will creep in ere it be closed, and listen to the old man's talk.

'Let me stay with you, grandfather, till the storm is over,' says the child, shaking with terror; 'when I hear the thunder and see the lightning, I fancy all kinds of dreadful things.'

'What things, my child?'

'I think of the great rebellion, and how our King was angry and banished us, and

^{*} Rom. viii. 22.

said we should live in chains and work hard in this cold strange land," said the child, sobbing; 'and I think perhaps He is angry still, and is coming with His armies to punish us still more.'

'My little one,' replied the old man soothingly, 'thou need'st not have such sad thoughts as that; a child like thee should be light of heart as a bird, and such fears are foolish, thou knowest well.'

'Yes, I know,' said the child; 'but when I hear the thunder and lightning, I forget all you have told me, and I shake and tremble all over.'

She was shaking and trembling as she spoke, and her old grandmother seeing this, let her sit in her little chair by the fire till the worst of the storm was over, and till her eyelids were growing heavy with sleep, ere she sent her off to bed.

One vivid flash startled her just as she

^{*} Gen. iii. 23, 24.

was lying down to sleep, but she closed her eyes tight, and saying to herself, 'I will not think foolish thoughts,' was soon asleep. But towards morning the thunder began again to rumble and peal, and she woke with a sudden start, and a cry of terror on her lips. It seemed to her that her little room was full of smoke, and in her fright she sat up in bed saying to herself:

'I am sure He has come at last, and is burning up our city. Grandfather says it is treason to say such things, and that our King is just and good; but even grandfather says we have turned rebels against Him, and Kings hate rebels, I know they do. And though grandfather and grandmother love Him and serve Him like good subjects now, I know there are many people here who are always plotting against Him; and who knows, perhaps He has discovered their wicked plans, and has come to put a stop to them."*

^{* 2} Thess. i. 7, 8.

Much more the child said to herself, and ever and anon she stopped in her reflections and cried, 'Granny.' But no one answered; and she was just thinking that she could bear her terror no longer, when the door of her room opened, and a woman with a lamp in her hand looked in.

'What, you here, little Hope!' she cried; 'poor child! poor child! Put your clothes on quickly; you shall come home with me.'

'Home with you?' said the little one in astonishment. 'Why, what is the matter? why can I not stay here?'

'Do not stop to talk, my child; be quick, I cannot wait!' and imperatively checking any further inquiries, the kind neighbour hurried Hope into her clothes, and taking her into her arms, ran quickly downstairs with her, and into the open air.

The little one tried to look round her, but the woman's shawl was over her head; and though she tried to free herself from its close folds, if for a moment she thrust her head out, all was so dark that she could see nothing. She heard voices, and the sounds of a great crowd and confusion; but until the kind woman put her on her feet inside her own dwelling, she had no idea what had happened. Safe in that shelter, she looked forth into the dawning daylight, and then what a sight met her eyes! Flames were shooting up into the sky from the thatched roof of her old home, which had fallen in on one side, and would, it was evident, be very soon completely consumed.

'Oh!' cried the child, clasping her hands in agonized terror, 'it is all on fire; and grandfather and grandmother, where are they?'

'They have been taken to the house on the other side of the lane,' her kind friend replied. 'Your grandmother was crying about her little Hope, and so I came to look for you. I must go back now, and tell her you are safe. You jump into my bed, my child, and get yourself warm.'

'Mayn't I go to granny?' asked the child. But the woman was already gone, and did not hear her. So she did as she was bid, and tried not to look out of the window at the burning house. No other was on fire; so it was plain her fears were groundless; the King had not come in wrath to burn all the city, as she had fancied.

Before long her friend came back; but she looked very grave, and when Hope begged to be allowed to return to her grandparents, she said:

'No; her grandmother was very poorly, and must be quiet for a few days. Hope must be contented and stay with her.'

It was hard, for Hope thought she could nurse her granny, and she longed much to be with her; but she was accustomed to do as she was told, so she made no complaints. It was sad to sit and look at the ruins of her old home and the poor desolated garden, and think of her granny's trouble, and not be able to comfort her.

At last, when a week had passed away, the much-desired permission was given; but, to her surprise, her friend stopped her exclamations of delight, and gravely said:

- 'You must not forget, little Hope, that your granny has been ill, and has had great trouble; you must be quiet and gentle, and try not to make a noise.'
- 'Oh, I will—I will! Poor granny! of course she will be sorry to have lost her nice cottage, but she will be very glad we are all safe; and grandfather, too—he will be glad to have his little Hope again, I know he will.'
- 'But, Hope, wait a minute. I must tell you something—you will not see your grand-father; he has gone away, and you will not see him for some time, perhaps.'
- 'Where has he gone? Is he looking for another house? He will want one now the old one is burnt.'

'No; he has gone a long way off. He has had a message from the court; the King has sent him word that he may return home, that his banishment is over; so his chains were taken off, and he has gone. You may guess how glad he was.'*

Hope looked very grave.

- 'Yes,' she said, 'he often said he thought the King would soon give orders for his recall. He must have been glad; but he might have said good-bye to me before he went.'
- 'He had not time; the orders were that he should go at once, and of course he could not wait.'
- 'Not if the King said He wanted him,' the child replied. 'But granny, was she not disappointed that the King did not send for her, too? She is nearly as old and tired as grandfather; and she often says this land is so bleak and cold, and she longs for her home.'t
 - 'She says she expects there will be a

^{*} Psa. liii. 6.

[†] Psa. cxxx. 6.

message for her very soon. Do you know, little Hope, I think the King has made her service and her chains much lighter lately, and that means that her time is nearly over too. But now you must run home at once. She will be expecting you.'

But little Hope did not run. She walked very soberly and steadily; for she was thinking that if all this were true, and that her granny's time of banishment was nearly over, she, poor little exile, would soon be left in this strange land alone. For though the band of banished men and women was still very large, she would not belong especially to any of them, and it seemed to her she should feel very lonely.

And this was about the truth. Days passed away, and without her grandfather, Hope did feel very dull and lonely; from time to time she heard that others of the exiles had gone back to their homes, and each time that she heard this she felt down-

cast and sad. It seemed to her that others were more fortunate than she. In former days the hard work given to her had often seemed quite pleasant, because she did it by her grandfather's side; now he had gone away, it seemed doubly hard and irksome.

'Why,' she often asked in a complaining tone, 'was her burden of labour so much heavier than that of some of her fellow-exiles?' and her chain, why must she always wear it, when others seemed to have none?'

Those who heard this complaint would smile pityingly.

'You are mistaken, little Hope,' they said.
'Many of those whom you envy think themselves much to be pitied, and consider their task much harder than yours; and whether you can see them or not, you may be sure they are bound with chains, and inasmuch as all our chains are not alike, it is impossible for any of us to say that another's are lighter than our own.'

- 'But,' urged little Hope, 'some are so soon released from service and allowed to return home; is it not hard that granny and I could not go when grandfather did?'
- 'Who can say? who can say?' was the reply. 'But don't fancy, little one, that all our people who leave this country are recalled by the King. No, no. Some are sent into a far more distant place of exile*—banished hopelessly, never to be recalled, and into a gloomy region where they say the sun never shines. It is like one long night, with neither moon nor stars to lighten it.'
- 'Oh dear, oh dear!' said the child. 'I thought there could not be a land more sad than this.'
- 'That is because you are sad just now. A little while ago you were gay as a bird, and you will soon be merry again, my dear.'

But Hope shook her head. She thought that after what she had just heard about the

^{*} S. Matt. xxv. 30.

distant land to which some of those she had known had been sent, she could never be happy again. But another thought had come into her head, and she asked no more questions just then.

It was plain that, since her grandfather had travelled back to the country which he had always called his home, he must have known which road led thither. How little Hope wished that he had told her; for the thought had come into her head that if, as her grandmother expected, a message should soon come for her, Hope had quite resolved that she would set out at once and beg to find the way It would be of little use to ask her granny to show her the road, for she had grown so old and feeble that she scarcely stirred from her cottage, and often slept for days together. She would be young again, she told Hope, when she got home, but not till then.

But though she would not question her

granny, Hope felt sure that, by some means or other, she would find out which was the road which led to the country they all wished so much to reach. She would ask all her friends with whom she worked every day for many hours; true, for the greater part of the day she was not allowed to talk, but bidden to work in silence; still, in the time allowed for rest she might talk, and she would make the most of that opportunity. First, she asked some of the children who worked with her, did they know which was the road which people must travel to reach the King's own country? Some laughed, and asked when she was going to set out? Others said it was the road they walked along every day; others said that any road led there, and some said they knew nothing about the matter, and cared nothing either.

But Hope was not to be so discouraged. No doubt these children were ignorant. So she tried some of the older among the exiles; and they did not, as the children, laugh at her question, but tried to answer her kindly and simply. But, to Hope's great surprise, no one seemed able to make her understand which road she must take. One said:

'Oh, it is quite an easy thing to find it; it goes straight out of the city and up the hill. You can't possibly mistake it, if you only go straight and don't turn to your right hand or your left.'

But another said:

'My dear child, it is a very hard thing for a little girl like you to find the way.* Some day, when I have time, I will go with you and point it out; but just now I have a great deal to do, and am very busy. But there is no hurry. You are so little; you could not take such a journey for a long time yet.'

Hope was greatly perplexed, but she was not to be discouraged; if no one would direct her, she would find out for herself which was

^{*} S. Matt. vii. 14.

the road which led from the land of exile into the country which many still called their home. Children had gone there as well as grown people, and they of course must have found the way.

Full of this idea she got up early one morning, and resolving that for once she would take a holiday, she put some bread in her pocket and started off. Her granny would not miss her, or at least she would only think she was going to her usual work; and Hope said to herself that as she was only going to find the road, and did not mean to set out on her journey that day, she was certain to be home before nightfall.

Everyone had said something about going uphill, so uphill Hope determined to go. Now the road which she had been used to walk along every day went uphill; but Hope felt sure that that could not be the right road, and so she turned in the opposite direction. Here was a road which seemed at first to

slant somewhat uphill; she would try that; very likely it would be steeper farther on. It was a fine breezy morning, and she trudged cheerfully on, thinking that before long she should catch sight of the hills of the far-off land about which she had heard so much. And meanwhile there was much to see which was beautiful; lovely flowers, grassy meadows, and peeps of glorious country in the far-off distance. At length the road began to wind around the side of a hill, and, at a sudden turn, she caught sight of such a gorgeous view that she uttered a cry of pleasure. Surely, surely, she was on the right road! How fortunate she had been! She was looking down over a thickly wooded hillside, below which rolled a bright sparkling river; the trees grew right down to the water's edge, and far away were to be seen the blue peaks of some distant hills.

Never had little Hope seen anything so lovely; and instantly the thought flashed

through her mind, that once, long ago, she had heard her grandfather speak of the river which he had to cross ere he reached home. Could there be any doubt now? The land which she had thought was so far away, might perhaps be only on the other side of the river. And this idea suggested another thought. If she really was so near, might she not go on and find her way to the beautiful country, and seek out her grandfather? would it not be a pity to go back to hard work and the dull life she had left, when such a beautiful land was near? Her grandmother, would she miss her very much? Hope hardly thought she would; and even if she did, was it not quite true that her time of exile was nearly over, and she would soon be released? Everyone said so: it must be true. Oh yes, it would be folly to go back. Hope could see a boat below on the shore, and some men beside it. She would run down and ask them to take her across; very likely they would be able to tell her which path she must follow on the other side, and that would be a great help.

Having come to this decision, the child was not long in making her way to the spot where she had seen the boat, and timidly, with many blushes, she ventured to make the request. The men looked at first puzzled, and then they smiled; and one patted her head, and said:

'You are all wrong, little one. The country you are seeking is not over there; your grandfather took another road, I'll be bound. You think yonder hills look very beautiful, but I've heard say that those who go there find themselves farther off from the King's country than we are here. So you'd better go home, and ask those who know to put you in the right road; surely, if your grandfather is gone, some one must have seen him go.'

And so poor little Hope turned back from

the banks of the beautiful river in great sorrow and disappointment; it was hard to believe that she could have been so deceived; and as she retraced her steps, she looked so often and so longingly at those blue mountains, that she forgot to heed her steps, and before long had strayed into another path from the one by which she had come.

At first she said to herself that this could not signify, since it would probably join the other path before long; but in a short time she found herself plunging into a thick wood, the boughs of which closed over her head, and shut out all view of the blue sky above her. But again she said that very likely this was only another, and perhaps a shorter way home; the wood could not be endless, and before long she should doubtless find a way out of it. On and on therefore she walked, until her little legs ached so much that she could hardly drag them along; fatigue made her anxious, and though she sat down for a while

to rest, she dared not waste much time in this way, lest the night should come before she was out of the wood.

'How strange,' she said to herself, 'it is that no one happens to be passing this way, who can tell me where I am and direct me right! If I met anyone now, I should ask him to tell me the way back to granny's cottage; for I must certainly give up finding the way to the King's country until another day. The man was right who said it was not easy to find the road.'

So saying, on she trudged; but no outlet to the wood was yet to be seen, and her heart began to fail her. The sun was sinking now, and as the shades of evening began to gather, it seemed to little Hope that the wood was not so silent and unpeopled as it had been when she entered it. From the thick underwood and from the deep ferny hollows she fancied she heard whisperings and mutterings, and once or twice her heart stopped beating, as a distant roar or growl fell on her ear.

Poor little Hope had often heard stories of wolves and bears who had been seen in the woods and mountains, but she had thought nothing about such creatures when she set out that morning on her travels; had she done so, all her desires to find the way to the country where her grandfather had gone, would scarcely have tempted her so far from home.

Still on and on she dragged her weary little limbs; she had eaten all her bread, and was growing faint with hunger as well as tired, but what could she do? To go back she durst not; she had come such a long, long way, that to think of retracing her steps was dreadful; it must surely be better to go forward. Tears had gathered in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks; but no one was there to see, and Hope let them run down, and only now and then put up a fat hand to rub them away.

The darkness of night had now fairly set in, and no longer able to see the path, though still too frightened to do aught but struggle on, the poor little one stumbled at almost every step. A straggling root of a tree stretching across the way caught her foot and fairly tripped her up, but she picked herself up sobbing, and tried to feel for her little hood, which had fallen off as she tripped. But it had vanished, and stretching here and there to find it again she found herself falling, falling, falling down a slippery bank, which seemed to slope down for ever. Down, down she went, clutching at long grass and bushes as she slipped, but grasping none, till at length she lay still among some prickly bushes, unable to see or guess where she was. She tried hard to get up, and after many efforts, succeeded in scrambling out of the briars: but then she stood still. Poor little Hope had lost all her courage now; it was useless to try to climb that slippery hill in the

dark, impossible to sit down among the thorns; she could do nothing but sob and cry, and wish and wish and wish that she had gone to her work as usual, and never been so silly as to think that by herself she could find her way to the beautiful country.

How long Hope stood there sobbing and crying and wishing, she never knew. The winds howled and whistled around her; strange voices chattered and muttered; more than once she heard the soft tread of what she was sure was some savage animal, and still it was dark. She had cried till she could cry no more, her eyes were aching sorely, when looking upwards, the wood did not seem quite so dark: far away in the distance there seemed to be a faint light; it came nearer, it grew brighter and clearer, lighting up the dark fir forest, shining along the path from which little Hope had fallen.* Had the moon suddenly emerged from behind some dark cloud? was this light

^{*} S. John i. 9.



A LIGHT IN THE DARK FOREST.



that of a moonbeam, or did it come from a lantern? and if so, who was carrying the lantern? Hope gazed in wonder and delight. Her granny, she felt sure, had begged some kind friend to come and look for her; for what else could have brought anyone into that dark wood at that time of night? It seemed, too, that her sobs and cries had been heard, for the kind stranger was making straight for the spot where she stood; and in another moment the light was shining full on her face, her poor little tear-stained face, as it was lifted up to the kind Face which was bending over her. Was she too tired to walk? then He would carry her.* She might lay her little aching head on his shoulder and go to sleep if she would: she need have no fear now of the dark wood and the wild beasts; and little Hope was glad to do as she was bidden. Only she could not help telling Him why she had wandered so far away, and left her granny

^{*} Isa. xl. 11.

and her work. 'She wanted to find the road to the King's country; she wanted to go and look for her grandfather, and no one would tell her which was the way. Was granny very much frightened about her? and was He very angry that she had given Him so much trouble?'

'Yes, granny was frightened; she had told Him, and so He had come to look for her. Little Hope might have perished in that dark wood if she had been left there till morning.'

So the kind Friend said, and Hope knew it was true, but:

'Oh!' she cried. 'I did so want to find out the right road, that if granny goes I may go too.'

'You must come to Me, and I will show you the road,' her kind Friend said;* 'if you had asked Me before, all this trouble would have been saved. I showed your grandfather

^{*} S. John xiv. 6.

the way long, long ago, and your grandmother; and I am ready and willing to show it to little Hope.'

'Oh, then I shall be happy,' said the child; and she clung to the strong arm that held her, and forgot all her miseries in the delight of knowing that the dark wood was now left far behind, and with it all her terrors.

And her Friend kept His word. From Him Hope soon learned to know the road which would lead her to her fatherland; it did not run along the shores of that sparkling river, or under those glorious blue mountains which she had seen, nor was it quite the sort of road which she had expected. But Hope's granny told her that He was the only person who could really show her the way which she so much wished to find; many people pretended to know, but He was the only Guide who could be trusted.

'You see, child,' said the old woman, 'we have lived here so long that we had quite for-

gotten the way home, and so the King sent Him to show us, and when word comes from the King that we may go home, it is He that goes along with us, and sees us safe there. Only remember, child, to mind what He says to you; learn to know the road now, and walk in it; but do not be in a hurry to get to the end before the King sends for you.'

THE HIGHWAY.

It was the courtyard of the palace of a mighty Prince—a Prince who ruled over many nations and many kings,* and whose court and palace were the most splendid that were ever seen. Great tidings had just been spread abroad; orders had been given, and messengers were starting to carry them to a distant land.

The King was about to make a journey through His dominions, to visit a remote province; and word had been sent by certain of His servants that all fitting preparations were to be made, not only to receive Him, but

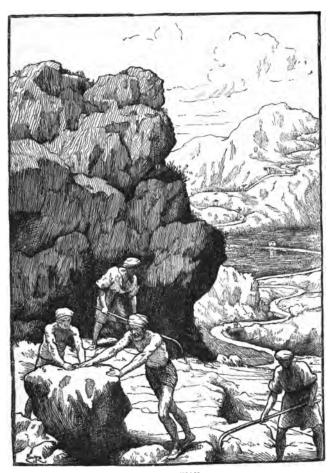
^{*} Rev. xix. 16.

to make His journey thither such as befitted His state and majesty.

Forth with glad speed rode the messengers, for the time fixed was not far distant,* and well they knew that there was much to be done. The road by which the King must needs travel had been so little used that in many places it could scarcely be traced; it had become little more than a footpath, and in some places it had vanished entirely. Along such a rough and unkept track the great King's glorious procession could never make its way: His servants must work hard, they must find other labourers to help them, that the road might be repaired and made fit by the day appointed.†

From all the villages along the route labourers were called out, and the work soon began in earnest. Many groaned, and said the task would never be done—and truly it did seem a terrible piece of work. For see,

^{*} Rev. xxii. 12. † Isa. xl. 3, 4.



THE HIGHWAY.



the road at its beginning ran down the side of a steep mountain, and then went winding and curving uphill on the opposite side of the valley. This valley, the King's servants said, must be filled, the steep heights must be levelled, the winding path must be made straight; for why should the great procession have to take a roundabout route when a straight one could be made for it? Then farther on great masses of boulders and uprooted trees had rolled down and blocked up the path entirely, half the mountain-side seemed to have descended and filled the plain; how could the King's chariot make its way over these great rocks? No, it was impossible: if the work was great the body of labourers must be great too; the King must be entreated to send help from the court, but on no account could the work be given up or allowed to languish.

Often, it is true, the weary workmen laid down their tools,* and sighed to see how little

^{*} Isa. xl. 30.

had been done; and these laments were specially heard at the spot where the levelling of the road was going on. When would that frightful hollow be filled up—when would the ups and downs be changed into a plain? Even those who were not busy working would often stand and watch the progress of the work; and often and often visitors from the court would come to see how things were going on. And when they knew that they were watched, the workmen would snatch up their tools again and begin their work with redoubled ardour.*

Now it so happened that at the bottom of the valley there stood a low-roofed cottage; how long it had stood there I cannot tell, but its owner had grown very fond of it. I am sure I cannot at all imagine why, for it was dark and gloomy; the trees around it, and the hill above it, shut out almost every ray of light; the rough mountain torrents often went

^{*} Heb. xii. т.

near to dash it to pieces, and the windows were so small and the door so narrow that light and air could rarely, if ever, find an entrance. And besides all this the house itself was built in the dampest, most swampy spot of the whole valley; but in spite of all these discomforts its owner had grown quite fond of it, and had never for a moment dreamed of quitting it.

The King's workmen looked at this miserable hut, for indeed it was little better, and said to each other that it would indeed be a happy thing for the poor man when he was persuaded or forced to quit that low swampy ground and build again on higher soil; but for a long time the man himself was of quite a different opinion.

'I have always been very comfortable there,' he said; 'people have often told me that sooner or later I should lose my health, but that day has not come yet. You say the ground is damp, that it grows more swampy every day, that the walls are mildewed, and that pools of water stand both inside and out; well, but if they do not hurt me, what then?'

And the more they reasoned with him the more obstinately did he persist in clinging to his miserable dwelling. And truly, to see it was indeed a marvel: damp was by no means the worst evil; lizards, fat frogs, long worms, and other unpleasant creatures crawled and hopped about it. Sometimes the pig, who had long made it his home, seemed to think it almost too unclean a habitation, and roamed about disconsolately among the pools of stagnant water. Outside, spiders spun innumerable webs over the tiny window, and large rats shared the poor man's food.

Still he was used to it; and if occasionally he felt uncomfortable and envied other men their better houses, the thought had hitherto been only a passing one. But now the case was different. Far off, on the hills above him, he could see the busy band of labourers;

and excited by curiosity, he had roused himself from his usual state of sluggish indifference, to go and inquire what they were doing. Then the tidings of the coming of the King to visit His dominions was told him; and to his inquiry which way the road was to be made, he was told the hollows below were to be filled up that the highway might be even and level.

'Then it will not come near my house?' he said, with something of regret in his tone.

'That depends on yourself, old man,' replied one of the labourers—a man with a glad face and a radiant smile. 'The road can easily enough be made on the other side of the valley, if you have no wish that it come in your way—if you care not to see the King.'

'If I care not!' said the man. 'Who said I did not care?'

'Folks say that you are fond of your old house down yonder, and will keep it at any price; and if the road comes your way, you know, it will have to go. The swamp must be filled up; no road can be made along such a place, and to fill it up your house must fall.'

'It is hard,' said the man, 'very hard!' and he went his way.

But the next day he came back again, and stood for a long time watching the work.

The labourers were such a merry band; they worked so heartily, and took such an interest in what they were doing, that the dull, indifferent look on the man's face seemed quite to pass away while he listened to their talk. He watched the movements of the strong arms which laboured, and wondered why his limbs seemed so weak and useless compared with theirs; could it be because they had lived in the light and fresh air, and he among the damp mists and clouds?

Then he went home again, and the old house did look darker than ever that day.

His eyes, which had been for awhile enjoying real light, could scarcely see anything in that dingy hovel, and for the first time in his life the crawling and hopping of the loathsome reptiles vexed and annoyed him.

The next day came, and the labourers on the hill above, looking down on the waste of marshy land below them, saw the old man leave his hut very early in the morning, and with feeble but very resolute strokes set about the demolition of his miserable dwelling. So rapid and determined were his efforts, that the many creeping and crawling things which had long made it their home had scarce time to make their escape ere the wretched building fell; and panting and exhausted with his labours the old man came toiling up the hillside, eagerly exclaiming:

'It is gone! I will make my house higher up, and on firm ground next time; and then, maybe, the King will pass my way.'

His voice trembled, but his look was glad,

and though there were tears in his eyes, they were mostly tears of joy; and when, soon after, he might have been seen in the busy band of workers on the highway, helping to fill up the uneven dip in the ground, no one would have guessed that his old home lay buried beneath the mounds of earth; they would only have said: 'He seems to be enjoying such health and strength as he has never known before.'

Meanwhile, the great work of making the King's highway proceeded, though immense difficulties lay in the way, for the road must be wide and straight; and when by means of casting up mounds the valley had been passed over, more than one hill had to be levelled, and the people who had settled far above found themselves as likely to be disturbed as those who dwelt in the valley below.*

Some, when they saw that the safety of their houses was threatened, wisely descended

^{*} Isa. v. 15.

into the plain; but there were some who could not be induced to believe that any danger was impending. The tunnelling which was going forward, and which was really shaking the ground beneath their feet, they persisted would not injure them, their houses were too firmly founded and strongly built—nothing short of an earthquake could move them.

- 'I have lived here all my life, and my ancestors for centuries before me; we are the oldest family in the country. Do you imagine that I shall change my home to please the whim of some workmen who choose to think that their road must needs go through my property? Not I, indeed.'
- 'And I,' said another, 'have bought the land on which my house stands. I have made up my mind that no other situation suits my position in society. Do you think I am going to live with people below me in rank and fortune?'

'Or I either,' added a third; 'I who built my house in this lofty position because I cannot live amongst people of base mind and inferior intellect, am I to go down and dwell among ordinary people because, forsooth, the King will have it so?'*

Thus they poured forth their complaints; but while thus occupied, little dreaming that it was so near, their ruin came. With a shock like that of an earthquake, with a noise like the roar of thunder, the ground beneath their feet sank, and they were buried in the ruins of the dwellings they had refused to leave. Men stood aghast at their fall, but none could help them.

'Will the King come soon?' some began to ask; 'if He does such things as these which we have seen, He must be stern and terrible! Does He care nothing for His subjects' sufferings?'

'Much, much,'t replied His messengers;

^{*} Prov. xvi. 18.

[†] Heb. xii. 6.

'but the King must be obeyed. He gives but few orders, but those must not be disputed. Will He come soon? How can He come until the road is finished?' and again they urged on the workmen.

'The road used to wind in and out,' observed a passer-by; 'it will be sooner put in order if you cut off corners and zigzags and make it straight; and——'

'Yes, yes,' said the surveyor, 'that is just what we intend to do.'

'Then the highway will not pass my house. I shall see nothing of the King's gorgeous procession; why should the route be changed, I should like to know?' inquired a peevish, downcast-looking man, who had heard this remark.

'You have heard the reason why,' was the answer. 'The King has said, let the road be made straight.* If you choose to live just where it takes that winding bend—which,

^{*} Prov. iv. 25.

by-the-bye, must be very vexatious for all whose business leads them to your house—why, you must take the consequences.'

'It is hard,' said the man, 'very hard; 'if the highway is made straight, no one will ever pass my house, and I shall lose all my business.'

'You will have to leave it, and live on the highway; for certainly we cannot make the road crooked to suit you.'*

The man looked disconsolate. He wanted to stay in the quiet corner, where so much could be done which would not bear to be seen by every eye; but he wanted, too, to be said to live 'on the King's Highway.' It was a serious difficulty, and I must confess I never heard how he settled it.

And now a new difficulty presents itself to the toiling labourers. The route by which the King will travel must pass through a rough and rocky piece of desert land. Surely

^{*} Heb. xii. 13.

[†] Matt. vi. 24.

some strange convulsion of nature must have taken place in this spot; perhaps an earthquake has thrown up those massive bits of rock, or a sudden flood may have brought them down from the heights.

But however this may be, the King's triumphant procession cannot certainly pass this way until they have been removed. So a band of men are ordered to bring horses, and ropes, and chains, and drag away the heavy blocks; and close on their heels follow others to rake and clear away the smaller pieces; and then succeed some mighty engines, to roll and crush down the sharp, pointed stones, which might still injure the passing foot.*

'Well, to be sure!' exclaimed a woman, who had long dwelt in this spot, 'I never noticed how rough the road was before. People have told me oftentimes that they could not bear to come near my house, but I

^{*} Ephes. iv. 31, 32.

never thought why it was. Is it really true that those pointed bits of flint can do so much harm as you say? make wounds that will never heal? Who would have thought it?'

- 'Are you sure they've never hurt you?' asked a bystander.
 - 'Me, no; I am not so tender.'
- But you said they'd kept your friends from coming nigh you; is that no harm?'

The woman smiled.

'To be sure,' she said, 'but if they kept the King from passing my way, that would be worse than all. Come, children, let's fall to and help to get rid of them.'

'Ah, if only all would help,' said a workman, 'the highway would soon be made; but so many who pretend to work do scarcely anything, and others are content to look on, and many strive to hinder.'*

And while he spoke, as if to fulfil his

* Phil. iii. 18.

words, a passing traveller kicked back into the road a heap of rough stones which had just been cleared away. He seemed to do it by accident, but however that might be, it was discouraging to those at work.

'Will the King really come?' asked a little child, as he stooped to pick up a stone almost too heavy for his strength; 'shall we really see Him? I wonder what He will be like, and how He will come?'

'He will come with trumpet-sound and glorious music; with splendid guards, thousands upon thousands. All will be so bright and dazzling that you will scarcely be able to look at Him. Yes, little one, when all is ready, be sure He will come.'*

^{*} Matt. xxiv. 30, 31.

THE BURIED TREASURE.

THERE was war in the land. From the far east a mighty host was advancing. Report said that so great was its number, so formidable its array, so perfect its discipline, that it was vain to resist, and equally vain to hope for mercy. Before its march the land was like a blooming garden; behind it stretched a waste, howling wilderness. Many a village had been burnt to ashes, and now a large and populous town stood in its way. Should they attempt any resistance? was the question which had been again and again debated by the inhabitants. And, as tales were told of the unvarying success which had hitherto

attended the march of the invaders, each face grew pale with terror, and each heart abandoned itself to hopeless despair.* Then another plan was suggested. If, as seemed probable, their city must fall into the enemy's hands, would it not be better to set it on fire, that at least they might be none the better for it? But lo! while they were talking, the enemy was advancing, and ere they had resolved on flight or resistance, the banners were waving within sight, and the long lines of glittering spears and scimitars were sparkling and flashing beneath the beams of the noonday sun, as, in splendid array, the vast army moved on towards the doomed city.

Within, all was terror and confusion. A humble submission or instant flight was now all that remained to them. Which should it be?

Yes, which? become slaves to the conquerors, or fly for shelter to some cave among

[#] Jer. iv. 30.

the mountains, leaving behind the homes and all the haunts of childhood, parting from many dear, perhaps never to meet again? Which should it be?*

'Anything but slavery! lade the mules with all speed, and let us away!' So between his teeth, in bitter rage and grief, spoke the head of one of the oldest families in the place; and, as he spoke, he glanced round on the marble halls of his palace, the bubbling fountain in his court, the bright flowers and graceful trees of his garden; and his flashing eyes were dimmed with tears to think that all must be abandoned for life and freedom. 'Better anything than slavery!' he repeated; and his wife echoed the words, only whispering under her breath, 'But our treasure, my husband, what of that? must we leave all to the robbers? cannot we hide it on our persons, and so carry it safely away?'

He scowled still more fiercely at this re-

^{*} Jer. xlix. 29.

minder. "Leave all to the robbers?" nay, not so! "Carry it away?" that would be scarcely possible.' There was scarce time to think, still less to act; yet something must be done.

'Bury it,' suggested his eldest son, 'and let no one of our slaves know where, lest they should turn traitor, and reveal to our foes what they would rejoice much to know; and my father, when this war has passed over, we can come forth from our hiding-place, and recover our buried wealth.'

'It is well,' said the old man, 'since nothing better can be done; we will hide our gold and jewels deep in the earth beneath the olive trees, and you, my children, mark well the spot where it lies hid.'

It was done as silently and secretly as might be, and then the fugitive family mingled with the crowd in the streets, and sought to make good their escape into the open country. But once outside their own gates, the crowd of desperate, half-maddened people surging backwards and forwards in the public thorough-fare made all hope of escape seem small. Panic had seized the populace; they were fighting with one another, trampling on one another, and ever and anon raising a piercing cry, 'They come, they come!'* Till at length, instead of struggling to reach the gates, each man was engaged in fighting for his life, and that not with his enemies, but with his fellow-citizens, maybe with his own friends.

It was in the midst of this storm-tossed, panic-stricken mob that the victorious army made its unopposed entry, and took the city. Did they pity the poor terrified inhabitants? Not they, indeed. The city was doomed! it was to be burnt to ashes; its people were to be given over to slaughter. What did it matter that there were within its walls countless human beings who loved life, and could

^{*} Nahum iii. 13.

not bear to die? thousands of little children who might have lived happy lives if one man had not decreed their death, and bade his soldiers massacre one and all.

Those soldiers cared little: they did their master's will, and called him a great conqueror, and thought no more about the city they had laid in ashes, and the men, women, and children they had sent out of the world. And the city lay in ruins; if any people were left there,* they soon went away and deserted it, and all was silent and forlorn.

Hundreds of years rolled away. That great conqueror had died, and many other conquerors besides he; but still that city lay in ruins. Here and there could be seen a bit of a wall, here and there the remains of a fountain or an old well; but creeping plants had twined around the ruins, and the trees had grown thick and tall, and bright-coloured

^{*} Nahum iii. 3.

flowers now blossomed where once had been roads and streets.*

At length there came a change. One by one a few humble cottages sprang up in this deserted place; very poor places they were, but they brought a little life back to the spot which had so long been silent and desolate; and the mules and goats which belonged to the owners of these poor huts clambered about over the masses of ruins, and made themselves much at home, where once had stood the halls and palaces of the great.

It was a dark night; some jackals or wild dogs were howling among the ruins, and a strange hot wind was blowing, when a man entered one of the meanest of these huts, his day's work over, to seek food and rest and shelter. Let us follow him. It is not a pleasant scene; the interior of the hut is no better than the exterior; rough walls, the bare ground for a floor, nothing clean or

^{*} Isa. xiii. 21, 22.

bright. And small as the dwelling is, it is inhabited not only by a woman and five children, but also by a donkey and some goats and fowls. Miserable in the extreme does the woman look, pale, thin, and squalid are the children, and by the pale light of the oil lamp we can see that the man is as miserable, pale, and thin as they. It is easy to see that the animals are by far the happiest of the inhabitants of the hut. A scanty meal is ready; and that over, the children settle themselves for the night, and are soon asleep. The man and his wife linger awhile longer; the former sitting in sullen silence, his elbows on his knees, his face the picture of wearyhearted hopelessness.*

'It has been hot to-day!' said the wife at length; 'the sirocco has been blowing; you are tired, more tired even than yesterday. Well, the lads are growing strong; with their help, surely the land will yield us better crops.

^{*} Eccl. ii. 11.

You work hard, but one or two pairs of hands cannot do all, or find bread for so many mouths.'

- 'It is not that!' he replied gruffly; 'it is the thieves! nothing is safe. I work for other men, and gather but half the fruit of my toil.'
 - 'I know,' she said, with a heavy sigh.
- 'Of what profit is this life,' he burst forth wildly, 'this toil and labour to keep up this weary thing called life? Why do we persist in trying to live, Rachel? better far give it up; it is too hard a task.'

She murmured something about hope.

- 'Yes, hope!' he said; 'you always speak of hope. I know not what it means. Long years ago, I could hope like other men, but now I laugh at the very idea. Hope! I hope for nothing.'*
- 'And yet you plough and sow,' she said.
 'Do you hope for nothing to come of it?'

^{*} Eccl. ii. 22, 23.

'It is a habit we have,' he replied more quietly. 'I sowed yonder field, and a good crop is ripening, but who knows if I shall reap it; or, if I reap it, who knows that I shall keep it? I bought a fine goat a week back, but ere I had led her home I was set upon, and she was carried off; I barely escaped with my life, as you know full well.'

She did know, and was silent; and after a minute or two, he continued:

'What I hope for is the grave—the long sleep, the quiet rest—of that none can rob me;* you too, Rachel, will ere long hope for that; but women are more patient than men.'

'The boys,' she said; 'I think of them.'

'They in their turn will learn to long for death; but they will hope on a while longer yet.'

And in this manner they talked till sleep surprised them; and not that night only, but many and many a night when darkness came

^{*} Job iii. 20, 21.

and work was over. And yet when the sun rose, the man went forth again and toiled and strove with a fast-breaking heart to make a living for his children.

For in the mountain fastnesses near at hand lurked a band of ruthless marauders. Were the vinesthat clustered round the poor man's dwelling laden with fast-ripening fruit, ere it could be gathered they were stripped and the rich grapes carried away. Was the little field which had been tilled with so much care covered with golden corn, it was as likely as not that the same unscrupulous hands might reap and bear off the precious grain. Did his goats wander far from the hut, it was but too likely he would never see them again, and his children might have to go half supperless to bed.

Sometimes they came by night, sometimes by day; not unfrequently some more daring than the rest would plunder the fields or garden before their owner's eyes, while the poor family stood by in helpless despair, knowing that it was useless to implore pity, and equally in vain to attempt resistance.*

One day, the father being absent, the mother and children were busy binding into sheaves the corn which he had reaped; they had been working all day under a broiling sun, eager to accomplish the business, and have the crop safely housed ere nightfall. The sun was setting, and the air was growing cooler; a slight breeze was stirring, and refreshed by it, and by the thought of the near approach of rest, their hearts were beginning to rejoice, when a faint sound of hoofs was heard coming up from a neighbouring valley where grew a grove of olives. The mother dropped the corn with which her arms were filled, and cast a terrified glance in the direction whence came the sound. The four lads had not caught the alarm so soon; their hearts were lighter, and not like hers, oppressed with constant dread; their tongues,

too, were busy, and in the merry flow of youthful chatter distant sounds were not easily heard. But when they saw the look of terror on her face, a silence fell on them all, and they, too, ceased their work, and stood still to listen.

'If father were only here!' they murmured, with white lips; but the mother answered between her set teeth:

'Better away! what could he do?'

'Oh, mother!' cried the youngest, 'let's run and hide. I cannot bear them; they terrify me nearly to death. Let's hide among the ruins yonder, where they will never find us.'

But the woman seemed rooted to the spot; not terror-stricken as were the boys, but full of rage at the thought that her children's bread was about to be snatched from them before her eyes. She would not run and hide; no, she would stay and curse the heartless ruffians who lived by plunder, and cared not how she and her children might be left to starve. A mother's curse, surely that must bring some punishment on the wretches, little as they seemed to heed it. For as they rode through the field, lading their beasts with as many sheaves as they could carry, telling her meanwhile that she had done a fine day's work, they only laughed at her shrill cries of passionate grief, and bade her keep her curses for those who cared about them.

But one, more savage-looking than the rest, turned round as they were riding off, and saying with bitter scorn, 'Good woman, you are teaching your sons bad manners; I will take one, and put him where he will learn better,' snatched up the youngest, who was cowering in terror behind his mother, and holding him fast across his saddle, put spurs to his horse, and was gone before she had recovered her senses enough to understand what had happened to her.*

^{*} Isa. xiii. 18.

The cries of the other lads soon roused her from her stupor of horror and bewilder-All had passed so quickly that it seemed like a horrid dream: the robbers were already out of sight; the sound of their horses' feet was dying away in the distance. But the terrible fact was plainly evident; they had not only carried off her corn, but her child, too. Never before had such a calamity befallen her; all former losses seemed as nothing; she would have given everything she possessed to have saved her boy. Oh, why had she refused to listen to his entreaty to hide when the robbers came? Why had she assailed them with such useless rage and anger, and so infuriated them that they had revenged themselves by taking from her her heart's darling? How should she dare to meet his father, and tell him all that had happened? Would he not be justly enraged with her, and tell her that she had brought her trouble on herself by her blind fury? Oh, if he did, she thought she should lie down and die; and, indeed, of what avail was it to live now—the brightest of her children carried off to be a slave, and the food of the family gone, too?

It was indeed a bitter home-coming for the poor father; a piteous group that awaited him with the news of dire calamity. To her relief he spoke no word of reproach to his poor wife, whose burden of grief was surely greater than she could bear; but for long hours he sat speechless on the ground, only from time to time breaking out into sighs and groans. The next day he roused himself, and said that though he had no idea which way to turn, he must go and seek his son. In vain his wife entreated him to stay at home, and not venture among those desperate men; in vain his children clung around him and wept, and said they should never see him again: he could not rest, he said, until he had made the attempt.

And so he went, and for many days he was away; and though they watched for him, he came not, till their hearts were well-nigh dead with fear. At last, worn out with travelling, broken-hearted with disappointment, he crawled home, and lay down, as he said, to die.*

But he did not die, much as he longed to do so; death would not come, though he prayed sore for it. And so he rose up, and as he could not bear to sit and watch his wife's despair, and see the hunger in his boys' faces, he went out to his work again. The sunlight dazzled him, and the heat seemed more than he could tolerate, so he dragged himself to the shelter of the nearest tree, and sat down to think.

But the heat was more than usually scorching, and before long he looked about him for some better shelter; the sun's rays beating upon his head seemed almost unbearable, and added the last straw to the weight of his

^{*} Job vii. 15, 16.

misery.* So he roused himself so far as to change his seat, and flinging himself on the ground beneath a large walnut-tree out of sight of his house and the sad scenes therein, he abandoned himself to despair. Of what avail were all his struggles, all his efforts to keep himself and those dearer to him than his own life from ruin and starvation? Sooner or later it must come; why not abandon the struggle, and let death come as soon as might be to end it all? The grave would at least bring quiet and rest, and quiet and rest surely meant happiness.

So he lay and thought, and the hours slipped by scarcely noticed by him; loneliness and silence brought some relief to his troubled spirit, and after a while he sat up and began to look about him. His eyes fell, it seemed by chance, upon a crack in the ground—a trifling crack it appeared at first sight, such as the heat of the sun might have caused; but

^{*} Job xxx. 30.

looking more closely, the man discovered that what was merely a crack on the surface, was a deep hole lower down. His curiosity was excited; he made the opening wider, and was much surprised to see how deep the hole was. And persevering in his work, he had soon made the opening large enough to admit his hands and arms; and from the bottom of the hole he drew forth a large earthen vessel, so heavy that his weakened frame had scarcely strength to lift it.

Peering into the darkness below he found there still remained other similar pots; and the poor man's heart beat fast and hard as he wrenched off the top to discover what it contained. Gold, gold—such a heap of gold as his eyes had never before rested on! was it a dream, or the real truth?* He rubbed his eyes, and looked again, but the hole was still there—the earthenware pots with their weight of gold; no, it was no dream, but sober truth

^{*} Prov. viii. 18-21.

and reality. He gazed around furtively; he could scarcely believe that no one knew of his discovery, or that he was quite alone in the field. If the owner of the field should by any chance pass that way, and the secret be found out! The thought was intolerable; and so, with hands trembling with haste, and heart beating wildly with hope, the jars were replaced in their hiding-place, the earth carefully smoothed over it, and the happy finder retired from the spot to think over his discovery, and make up his mind what to do.

He could scarcely bear to lose sight of the spot where the treasure lay hid, but at the same time he hardly dared venture to look at it, lest others might follow the direction of his eyes, notice that the earth had been disturbed, search as he had searched, and find as he had found. More than once ere nightfall, he crept stealthily back to the spot to make sure that no one had been there since he had left the spot; and it was not until

darkness covered the earth, and every eye was closed in sleep, that he ventured to seek rest himself.

But even then he could not sleep. Hunger and distress, grief and anxiety, had often before this driven sleep from his eyes; now joy and hope had banished it quite as effectually. He lay awake to plan and scheme; one thing he had quite resolved he must buy that field where the treasure lay hidden. But how? That was the difficulty. It was a large piece of ground; how could he raise money enough to make the purchase? In their sore distress most of their little property had already been sold; would the few goats, the tiny piece of land that was his, and their few household possessions, produce a sum that would satisfy the owner of the field?

Over and over again he made the reckoning, calculating to his best ability what each article would realize, and longing for the daylight to come that he might set about the execution of his design.

He had meant to keep the whole matter secret, even from his wife and children, fearing lest in their joy they might let fall some word among their neighbours. But his changed mien, from the despair of the previous day to the excitement of hope, made them eager to know what had happened; and by degrees they drew the story from him.

There were many exclamations of delight and joy, but these were at once checked and suppressed, lest some passer-by might overhear. It was hard to make the little ones understand the need for so much secrecy; joy was such a new experience to this poor family, that they could see no reason why all the world should not know the cause.

The next few days were anxious ones to them all; the husband and wife could scarcely rest at all until the sale of all their little property was effected, and the purchase on which their hearts were set was accomplished.

The owner of the field was by no means desirous to part with his land, and the bargain was not concluded until the last mite of the poor family was paid down. And oh, what agonies of suspense and fear they endured ere the title-deeds were handed over to them! At times the poor man's heart almost ceased to beat while the bargain was under discussion, and he could scarcely contain himself with joy when at last the land was fully and entirely secured to him.*

'It seems to me that it must be all a dream,' his wife exclaimed, as she followed her husband to the spot about which he had so often told her. 'Oh, what will become of us if, after all, no treasure is there!'

'Trust me,' the man replied, with a look of triumph such as his wife had never before seen on his face. 'I know I am not dreaming.'

* Matt. xiii. 44.

She said no more, but grasped more tightly the hand of her youngest child, who was clinging to her side.

She could scarcely bear the suspense of the next few minutes; her heart was beating so painfully with mingled hope and fear, that she could hardly breathe while the earth was scraped away, the stone lifted up, and the old earthenware jars raised and brought up to the light of the day. Swiftly, and without speaking a word, they were carried by her husband and sons across the field to their own home; and there, amid many exclamations of curiosity and impatience, they were broken open, and with triumphant joy, one leathern bag after another was drawn forth, and gold and jewels of priceless value came to light.*

The children shrieked with joy, clapped their hands, and fairly danced with delight. But the parents could not speak. Too long

^{*} Psa. xix. 9, 10.

they had borne their burden of poverty, grief, and pain, to be able at once to realize all the joy of the relief.*

'If only we can keep it,' was naturally their first thought; and in this terrible anxiety they could neither rejoice in their new possessions, nor consider what good it would bring them, until they had found a safe hiding-place for it, where no passing traveller might spy it, nor ruffian robber hunt it out.

To keep it safe, to make sure it was really their own, was now their great object; and with this end in view, the sons were strictly charged that, for the present at least, they should not speak of it to any of the neighbours.

'When we have made our home secure from thieves, then, and not till then, will it be safe to tell this good news,' was the

^{* 2} Cor. iv. 6, 7.

father's decision, and all felt that he was right.

And did they keep it safe? Listen again to their talk a twelvemonth later. Light has come back to the poor wife's eyes, hope to the husband's heart. She speaks joyously:

- 'Husband, do you remember that miserable night when little Jusuf was carried away, how we sat on the ground and groaned, and wished we were in our graves?'
- 'Aye, that do I, right well; I had wished it many a year.'
- 'And do you remember that day when you made that happy discovery about the field and the treasure?'
 - 'I shall never forget it.'
- 'Can you reckon up all the good that treasure has brought us, or have you forgotten—it seems so long ago?'
 - 'Long, is it? It seems not so to me. It

gave us back our boy—that's one thing, isn't it? And it has given us all light hearts—that's no slight good, for sure?'*

'And a happy ho me! No grumbling or complaining; no wishing for death and the grave!' added his wife.

'Yes, a happy home; and the prospect of a better one, some day.† This does not content me, my wife; I am looking forward to something quite different before long; and, till that time——'

'We have much to content us,' broke in his wife. 'Since that fortunate day, we have had friends to love, and who love us;‡ food to eat, and food that satisfies;§ clothes too, such as we never dreamed of, my husband!'||

'Safety and protection, too; no fear of harm to us and our dwelling now! We are

^{*} Rom. xi. 33. † John xiv. 2, 3. ‡ John xv. 12-14. § John vi. 35. || Rev. iii. 5.

better guarded and defended than many a chief! he added. 'Yes, we have light and joy, we have rest and peace, and all through the buried treasure.'*

* Psa. xci. 10-16.

THE ADOPTED SON.

It was midsummer, and the afternoon of a very sultry day; no breath was stirring in the thick foliage of the great oaks and beeches; the flowers had opened wide to meet the fierce rays of the sun, and no cloud flitted across the blue heavens. It was a time to bask in the sun, to lie and think, or perhaps to dream; and, under the shade of a wide-spreading oak, sure enough a lad was lying, with half-closed eyes, either thinking or dreaming.

He was a strong, sunburnt lad, and for his strong arms and sturdy legs there was certainly work in the world; but the boy had stolen from his work, and was lying on his back doing nothing.

But he was talking to himself, and ever and anon he repeated, with puzzled air, and rubbing his hand across his brow:

'What could she mean? What could she mean?'

And then he wondered if he was dreaming, or if perchance he had been dreaming when the words which perplexed him so much had reached his ears. Certainly he was in bed—perhaps he had been asleep when he had overheard his parents talk about him the night before. Was it possible he could have dreamt it all?

No, he told himself, it was not possible; he was sure he had been wide awake when they had talked about their poverty, and wondered where the rent was to come from, and how the doctor's bill was to be paid—subjects so often discussed between them. Then he remembered as plainly as possible how they

had talked about his schooling; and then had come the words which had so much perplexed him. It had been his father's voice that had uttered them:

'Well, it is a grand thing to know that he may be rich some day!* Do you often talk to him about it, mother?'

'Nay,' his mother had said; 'time enough when he is older.'

'Rich some day!' which could it mean? He, a poor boy, whose father and mother were often sore put to it to find their daily bread, how could he be rich some day! True, he might work hard, and rise to be a great man like some other lads he had heard about; but little David had no great liking for hard work, and had a strong conviction that he should never grow rich in that way. It was a much more agreeable thing to fancy that, without any exertion of his own, he might rise to greatness and power; and the

^{*} Ephes. ii. 4-7.

more he thought over his father's words, the more he persuaded himself that such was to be the case. But if it was really true, why had his mother never told him about it? She had said it would be time enough when he was older; but David was not inclined to rest in uncertainty so long. He would tell his mother what he had heard her say when she fancied he was asleep, and would ask her what she meant: and if she would not tell him, he would try to extract the secret from his father; for the more he thought about it, the more David was determined that he could not be satisfied until he had found out-all. And why wait? why not run home at once and ask his question? His mother would be at home busy with her washing; there would be no one to hear—no one to interrupt; and so thinking, he rose to his feet, and, forgetting all about the heat, walked rapidly homewards.

The door was wide open on account of

the heat; and his mother looked up as he entered—a questioning look—for she wondered what had happened to make him enter so hastily, and with such an eager look. But seeing that he was unhurt, well, and in no trouble, she said nothing; and, as soon as he could find breath to speak, David began eagerly:

'Mother, do tell me, what did you and father mean last night when you said some day I might be very rich? I've been wondering ever since; for I can't understand it at all.'*

His mother looked surprised — a little vexed, he thought—and for some minutes she made no reply; then, seeing that he was about to break out in more earnest entreaties that she would tell him, she said:

'Hush, David! why art so impatient, lad? If you heard what we were saying last night, you must have heard me tell thy father that

^{*} James ii. 5.

you were not old enough to know what you are so keen to learn; why, then, ask me now?'

'Because, mother, I cannot rest without knowing. I heard by chance last night—but if you will not tell me what you meant, I shall be always thinking about it day and night; and I shall never be able to settle to anything.'

His mother sighed.

- 'And are you sure you'll not be more restless still, lad, if I do tell you?'
 - 'Nay, mother; why should I?'
- 'Well,' she said, 'we will see. Listen to me, my son, and I will tell you something of this story that you are so bent on hearing. You talk of riches, and of being rich; and you know some rich people who live near here, and perhaps you sometimes envy them and wish you were as well off as they. But there lives at some distance from this place, I cannot say for certain how far, a certain

great Lord, whose riches are immense—so great that no one can say how much He possesses;* in fact, poor folks like us could never force our minds to picture them to ourselves. Well, some keep their riches to themselves, and give nought away; but not so this great Lord. He is good, and kind as He is rich; and He has chosen from time to time to seek out a poor child, and to adopt him as His son.† Well, David, do you understand me now?"

The lad's gaze was fixed on his mother with intense eagerness; but when she asked this question, he cast down his eyes, and with some hesitation replied:

- 'Did you mean, mother, that He has adopted me?'
- 'I mean, David, that He has told your father and me that He is willing to adopt you if—if—there is some uncertainty about it, my dear boy.'

^{*} Psa. cxlvii. 5.

[†] Ephes. i. 5.

- 'If you are willing, you mean, mother.'
- 'Oh, David, we are willing enough; the question rather is if you are willing!'*
- 'I, mother! He cannot surely doubt that. I was wondering why He, a great Lord, should think of adopting a poor lad like me! But perhaps He did not really mean to make me his son!'
 - 'Yes, David, he did; he told us so.'t
- 'And could he doubt that I should like it? Oh, mother, to think of being rich, heir to a great Lord, instead of being always poor and looked down upon and despised. And no hard work either, mother.'
- 'Indeed, David, you are much mistaken. No hard work indeed! Why, when I look at you, so fond of play, often so idle, I say to myself "It is of no use—he will never be fit to be the heir.'"
- 'But why, mother? I thought rich people never did anything but amuse themselves.'

^{*} John i. 12.

[†] Mark x. 14.

'Well, David, I will tell you what this great good Lord said when He offered to adopt you as a son; and then you will see if you can accept his offer, and still do nothing but amuse yourself. He said, "If he really wants to be My heir, and share with My other adopted children in my wealth, he must be educated and made fit.* I will provide the means, but he must use them, and do his utmost to make progress, that I may not be ashamed of My son. Then he must pay attention to My wishes, and try to learn how to please Me, or I shall never wish to have him to live in My house. And besides all this, he must give up all habits which would be unbecoming in a son of Mine; and all friends who would be likly to hinder him from growing up such a man as I wish him to be."† This is what he said, David, and he added that he would have you love him with all your heart.'

^{*} Rom. viii. 14. † 1 John iii. 1-3. ‡ Matt. xxii. 36, 37.

But David's looks had suddenly become downcast. The prospect before him was evidently not all that he had at first fancied it; and when his mother ceased speaking, he did not seem inclined to answer her.

Seeing him thus lost in thought, and evidently in a difficulty, she added:

'Now you know all, David, and you can think about it;' and then she went away and left him.

After a while the lad got up and sauntered out again. It seemed to him that he had a great deal to think about; and the more he thought, the less he felt inclined to come to a conclusion.

Many days passed away in this way. Sometimes David lay in the grass and dreamed away long hours, thinking of the delights of such a life as that led by the rich and great; of the splendour of the house which had been offered to him, and of the good which he might do if he became the son

of one so great. Sometimes he asked himself if he could make up his mind to study hard to fit himself for that position, and at other times he wondered whether it would be very hard to part from some companions and some habits which would ill become such a home and such a life.* At one time he would resolve to make the trial, at another the work seemed too hard, and in this state of constant wavering the time went on.

Days passed, months passed, years passed, and David had come to no decision. His mother often said to her husband that she feared their great and kind Friend would give up His kind intentions when He saw how little the boy seemed inclined to follow His wishes; but the father said, 'David is still young; we will hope he will be wiser soon.'

But one day a terrible calamity befell little David; his father was struck down by sudden illness, and it was said that he had not long

^{*} Gal. v. 19-21.

to live. When he heard that, he called the boy to his side, and spoke to him long and earnestly. Once more the child heard the story of the rich Friend, who was willing to adopt him, and make him heir to such wealth and splendour as he could never hope to obtain by any exertions of his own. His father told him more about it than he had ever done before. He exerted his failing strength to the utmost in his attempt to make the boy understand how splendid was the offer made to him; and with almost his last breath he said:

'David, as I must leave you, it is a great happiness to me to know that you have such good prospects, and a Father who can do so much more for you than ever I have done, or could do.'*

Then he died, and in the midst of his sorrow at the loss of his father, David often thought of these his last words. He wished

^{* 2} Cor. vi. 17, 18.

he could see this rich Friend; but his mother told him that He lived far away, and she did not seem to expect that He would come into those parts for some time; and when he asked her questions she would answer with a weary sigh:

'You must try to please Him, David; you have no other father now.'

And David heaved many a sigh in return, saying to himself, 'If I only knew how to please him!'

Thus the sad days that followed his father's death passed by, the dark days of winter-time; but with the spring, the boy's high spirits returned, and in his sports and work he grew once more so engrossed, that the future and what was to become of him very seldom occupied much of his thoughts. The story he had heard faded in a great measure from his memory; or if he thought of it at all, he scarcely believed that it was true.

He grew strong and healthy, able to earn

some shillings a week to help his mother, which was as much as a boy of his age could be expected to do; and his ambition to rise higher seemed to have died out entirely. If ever he thought of it, it was only to say to himself regretfully, 'I wonder if there was any truth at all in that story?'

But one day as David was returning home from his daily work, his path led him through the churchyard; and being tired, he sat down to rest for awhile on the wall near his father's grave. It was nearly sunset, and the shadows of the trees were long and deep; but some bright rays of sunlight still fell across the grass, and gave a quiet radiance to the scene. A feeling of solemn awe possessed young David's soul. He thought again of his father's death-bed, and with the remembrance was mingled the thought of that other Father of whom he knew so little.

Just at that moment a voice spoke his name. He turned, but a stranger stood

before him; and as he rose, the man spoke again:

'You do not know me, David. Well, I am not surprised at that. I have a message for you; and hearing that you would pass this way on your road home, I came to seek you. I am a messenger from a kind Friend of yours.* I believe you have heard much of Him—most likely He has sent you messages before this; but my mind misgives me that you have never answered Him.'

David coloured, but made no reply; and the messenger went on:

'You know of whom I am speaking. Well, the message I bring is the same as He has sent before; but, young man, I warn you that it is not a message that should be trifled with as if it meant nothing, and needed no reply. He bids me tell you again that, seeing you are poor, and He is rich—that you have many wants, and He an abundance of

^{*} John xiv. 26.



DAVID BY HIS FATHER'S GRAVE.

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riches, He is ready—yes, more, He wishes to adopt you into His family, and make you His son. He has watched you all your life long; He knew your father and your mother, and He loves you well. He is great and powerful, wealthy and full of kindness. What are you thinking about to neglect His offer?**

David was greatly surprised at the stranger's address; and greatly at a loss how to answer him.

'You forget, sir,' he said at length, 'that though I have heard of this wonderful chance for me before now, I really know so little about your Master, that I cannot decide what answer I must give.'

'Know so little about Him! Cannot decide! Then do you mean to say you do not think His offer worth accepting? If so, that is, I suppose, my answer—a strange one indeed?'

^{*} Heb. xii. 25.

- 'But,' urged David, 'you forget that if I do not know Him, I cannot tell if I am fit to be His son.'
- 'You are not fit to be His son; but He wishes to educate you, and make you fit. Have you not heard that before?'*
- 'Yes,' David admitted; 'he had heard that; but it seemed to him that he never could be made fit. He, a poor man's son, used to low and vulgar ways, how could he learn to behave himself as a nobleman should?'
- 'That is not for you to settle. If you wish to be His son, He will see that you are made fit. But do you wish it?'
 - 'Sometimes I do-I think I do.'
- 'Then if you do, He bids me tell you that He wishes you to give Him something.'
- 'I—I give *Him* something! What have I to give? Nothing, I am sure, that He would care for—nothing that He would not despise!'

^{*} Rom. viii. 30.

'He will not despise it, because He asks for it;* He asks His adopted son to give Him something. You must think of the best thing you have—the choicest of all your possessions—and you will see He will not despise it.'

'And if He accepts it, I shall know then that I am adopted?' David replied, a sudden flash of light passing over his face; 'and then——'

'Then you must put yourself into His hands, and follow His guidance and directions; and when the time comes for you to enter His house as His son and heir, He will not find you unfit.'t

The stranger went his way, and David went home as in a dream; he was ashamed to think how ungrateful he had been for so many years, and wondered much that his father's Friend had had so much patience with him, condescending to send him another

^{*} Prov. xxiii. 26.

[†] Rom. viii. 17.

message when he had paid no attention to all that he had heard through his parents before. Henceforth he was resolved he would be no more ungrateful. If his Father would take a present from His adopted son, the very best he had should certainly be given. What that was David had already decided, and without more delay the gift was offered; and, need I say, it was not refused.

THROUGH THE WAVES.

'WHITHER is she bound?'

This was the question passed from mouth to mouth as the spectators watched a merchant vessel sailing forth from the harbour, and the smooth waters within it, into the rougher waves outside. Little was known about her by those who asked the question; but as she unfurled her sails to meet the favouring wind, and her freshly-painted keel cut the water, there was something so trim and neat about her appearance that all noticed and remarked upon her.

The sun was shining brightly; and as its rays sparkled upon the water, making it look

now blue, now green, and gilding the crested waves with flashes of dazzling light, the brave ship rose gallantly on the waves, as if she was glad to be free from the quiet and repose of the harbour, and joyed to go forth to meet the perils and adventures outside on the wide ocean, which stretched far away into the distance.**

'Yes, as you say, it's a pretty sight,' said an old sailor; 'but there are winds and storms for her yet: her sails will not look so trim in a few months' time, I warrant you. Maybe she'd be fitter to weather them if she weren't altogether so pretty; but who can say? There's many a vessel that leaves this port that never reaches its destination—many a one that has looked as fair as that, and gone forth as bravely, that now lies at the bottom of some deep sea, its crew lost, its cargo wasted; and many another has been split to pieces on rocks. Ah! who can tell?' and he shook his head despondently.

^{*} Heb. xiii. 14.

'Let us hope the storms will be few, and the sunshine will follow her most of her way,' was my reply to the gruff old man; but he shook his head.

'You may hope—hoping does no harm; but a boat is not worth much that can't stand a bit of a gale.'

And the old man went off shaking his head, and telling how many of the pretty little vessels which he had known had capsized in the first storm.*

It made me sad to listen to him, and I was glad when he was gone. He had seen more of the dangers of the sea than I, and I could not deny that he might be right; but still I hoped, and I liked to hope. I have watched many a ship since then; and, though I still like to hope, I am bound to say that the old man had indeed but too much cause for his apprehensions. And I too could tell of many a ship that started well and boldly,

^{*} S. Matt. xiii. 21.

but never reached its destined port. Still I am glad to know that in some cases, at least, my hopes were more than fulfilled.

There was one little vessel which sailed out of the harbour with such a buoyant motion; she spread her white sails so briskly to catch the breeze, and her keel cut the water so sharply, that she was soon far on her way. She sailed right away into the sunlight, and the sails continued white; the decks were always clean; no adverse wind came in her way, no sudden calm stopped her progress. The old man's prophecies were certainly not fulfilled in her; for her voyage was speedily at an end, and the port was reached in safety.*

But to return to the ship which we saw starting on her voyage. She, too, was a graceful vessel, with rich-coloured brown sails, which looked extremely well that sunny day; and as she passed out of the harbour

^{*} Psa. lxxxiv. 5—7.

she hoisted her flag, and, as I said before, rose on the waves so joyously that it was indeed a pretty sight. Yet it seemed to me that her planks quivered as she faced some huge rolling billows; and I watched her somewhat anxiously, remembering a story I had once heard of a ship which had foundered just as it was starting on its voyage. But this sturdy ship was not going to capsize: she rose on the waves, and, as if she gained courage as she proceeded, went bravely forward.

'That modest little vessel,' said a man who was watching her, 'is heavily laden for her size. You would not have guessed it; but she has a most valuable cargo on board, and will call at many ports to trade before she reaches her final destination.'*

'I hope, then, she will have fair weather; I should tremble for her if she should meet with a stiff gale,' I replied.

^{*} Acts xi. 24.

'Oh, don't be afraid! Her owner knows her well, and can trust his ship, or he would not have put such a cargo on board.'

My friend was right. The brown-sailed ship sailed bravely on for many a long day. She entered many ports, and did good business for her owner; and wherever she went, all spoke well of the little ship.

But one day the clouds grew ominously dark; the waters looked leaden-coloured—they surged and rolled, and dashed over the little ship. The captain's heart grew heavy: he looked at the clouds—he looked at the waves—he listened to the howling wind—he thought of his valuable freight, and of the port he had hoped to reach before the storm came on. The timbers creaked and groaned; but still the little vessel struggled on its way till, with a deafening noise, the sail split from top to bottom, and hung in ribbons from the mast.*

^{*} Psa. xlii. 7.

Then there was a terrible stillness on board:* no one spoke, for indeed in the uproar caused by the winds and waves no voice could be heard. Then there came another terrible blast, and the main-mast snapped before it like a twig in a strong man's fingers. The broken top was hanging by the cordage—a miserable sight—but the crew could scarcely keep on their feet; and it was not until the fury of the storm had somewhat died away that they could cut off the shattered mast and torn sail and throw both overboard.

Near at hand, as the captain well knew, were dangerous quicksands; the ship refused to obey her helm, she seemed driven hither and thither at the mercy of the winds and waves. Who could tell from moment to moment whether she would not find herself on these fearful sands? and then what hope would remain?

^{* 2} Cor. iv. 8, 9.

Numbed with cold, drenched to the skin, the frightened crew clung to the masts and ropes, and longed for the day—that day which seemed as if it would never, never come. For all around no ray of light broke the intense blackness of the sky, no star peeped forth to give one glimmer of hope, each moment the darkness grew more intense.

'Will it never end—this black awful night?' groaned the captain. It was useless to speak to his men, the howling and whistling of the wind prevented all chance of being heard, despair made all dumb.

At length there came a lull, a long gust of wind died away in a sobbing breath, and silence fell upon the dark sea. On board no one spoke; they waited, scarcely daring to hope that the worst was over. The captain hardly dared to breathe; but his anxious eyes before long discovered a rift in the blackness overhead, and as he watched the tiny rent with momentarily increasing hope, the cloud

suddenly split, and the moon's rays peeped forth. It was still an angry sky, still a troubled sea; but hope sprang up in the captain's breast; and when one by one a few stars became visible, and the angry waves began to still their raging, he ventured once more to think of the future and to look forward to the distant haven.

It was a sorely damaged craft that arrived the next day in a friendly harbour, and asked for shelter and time to repair. But the crew found kind friends and ready help, and in a very short time, with cheered hearts and a sound ship, they started again on their voyage.

'All must expect a rough blast or two,' the captain said with his cheery laugh; 'perhaps the winds will favour us the rest of the way;' and he cheered his men with bright hopes, and they thought no more of the dangers that were past.*

^{*} Phil. iii. 13, 14.

And then for a while the seas were calm. the winds soft and gentle; enough to speed them on their way, not heavy enough to raise their fears. The ship stayed awhile in a great port, where the captain had much business and made many friends for his master; he had pleasant news from home, and took in fresh water and a stock of provisions for the further voyage. Then away they sailed again across a mighty ocean, where they sailed for days and days and saw no other ship. But the sea was calm, the sun was bright, the sea-birds flew past them, the merry fish played round the ship, they sang their happy songs, and were light of heart and feared no ill.* But one day the captain's face looked sad, and his voice was. He watched the clouds and the waters and shook his head. 'We are becalmed.' he said: 'the sails are useless: there is not a breath to swell them: the sea

^{*} Psa. lxxi. 23.

is as still as glass. I wonder how long this will last.' For he was thinking of his provision of water, and wondering with some misgivings how long it would hold out.

And each day the air grew hotter and drier; the stillness of the waters was intense. Leaning over the edge, the sailors could see no motion, and hear no ripple against the ship's side. It was strange and awful.* No other ship came near, for none could sail in that motionless sea; and there seemed nothing to do but sleep away the long, weary hours.

Then came a still more fearful time, the water was getting low; if the calm lasted a few days more they would begin to suffer from the horrors of real thirst.† It did last many more days, until the lips grew parched, the faces hot and feverish, the eyes looked dim and glassy. The captain's heart was fast fainting within him; he thought of his master,

^{*} Psa. lx. 1. † Psa. xlii. 1—3.

who had trusted so much to him, and wondered what would be the end of it all. He bowed his head upon his hands, and his brave heart was well-nigh breaking.*

But what was that which touched his head? again, what was it? He raised his face, a cool drop fell on his brow; he looked up, another and another fell with delicious splash on his burning cheeks. He could scarce believe his senses, or take in at once all the joy that the promise of those precious drops afforded. But the shower steadily increased; a slight breeze rose; the waters seemed once more to heave and swell, and the ship began to advance.†

The misery was at an end, the anxiety gone; the rain soon fell in torrents, and when it ceased, a good breeze carried the brave ship onward.

And now the long-desired harbour was in sight; at first like a thin streak of light on

^{*} Psa. xxxviii. 1—10. † Isa. liv. 7, 8, 10.

the horizon, then, as the ship drew nearer, the captain could discover through his glass the gleaming tops of beauteous palaces, rich groves of trees and blue mountain-tops; it was a sight to feast one's eyes upon; but there was still something to be done ere it was reached*—the, harbour-bar to be crossed and the captain had heard much of this famous bar, and could not help looking forward to the passing of it with anxiety.† master, the owner of the ship, when sending him out had bade him run no unnecessary risks; and now that the harbour was so near, it behoved him to be more than ever careful. so that he might not by impatience lose all that he had gained. There was the harbour full in view, the smooth waters and safe anchorage; but between it and the ship lay a formidable ridge of black rock, which at low tide could plainly be seen. He must wait until a stiff breeze and favouring tide could

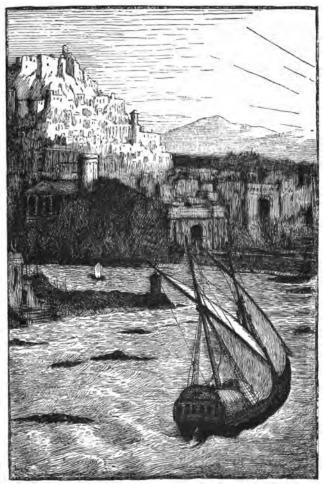
^{*} Heb. xii. 22, 23.

[†] Rom. v. 12.

carry him safely in. It was not easy to be patient; the crew was tired; everyone longed for rest and to reach the shore which looked so near; and the tide which should carry them in seemed a weary while in Every eye was fixed on the coming.* farther shore, lighted up by all the glories of a rich sunset glow, and the dangers of the harbour-bar were quite forgotten. And even while they gazed the tide had risen, the black reef had disappeared from view, a strong wind filled the sails, and ere they were aware the little ship was borne on the bosom of a mighty wave right across the bar into the calm waters of the much-longed-for haven. True, the keel of the vessel scraped on the rock, and the captain felt the timbers creak and quiver, but before a thought of fear had time to fill his mind, he found himself passing into the very harbour itself, and listening to the shouts of greeting that reached him from the shore.t

^{*} Phil. i. 23.

[†] Psa. cvii. 30.



CROSSING THE HARBOUR-BAR.

. . -.

THE QUARRY.

'A GREAT building; yes, indeed it will be a great building when it is finished, but when that will be is more than I can tell you.'

We were passing through a vast quarry when this remark was made; and the speaker was gazing on the piles of stones around him, and replying to one who not unnaturally made the observation that some great building must be in process, for which so many stones needed to be hewn.

- 'Aye, truly, a very great building; but I have not seen it as yet.'
- 'And why not? Surely it must be worth seeing?'

'To be sure; but it is very far away, and none in these parts have seen it.* The stones are severally prepared on this spot in the quarry, and are not carried thither until they are ready to be placed in the spot intended for them.'

I looked around: it was plain my informant spoke the truth. Here were stones in every stage of preparation; here the rough block just hewn from the rock, all rough and ragged; farther on, a similar slab being made smooth and shapely; and farther on again, another polished and carved, fit, it seemed to me, for the most beauteous building ever seen.

I watched the work as it went forward, and went right into the quarry to examine the rock from which the blocks were hewn.† It was grey stone, nothing remarkable in any way; and at first sight it appeared to me that each block must require just the same

^{*} Isa. xxxiii. 17.

[†] Isa. li. 1.

handling and treatment in order to fit it for its place in the great Temple which was being built.

But 'Not so,' said my friend; 'watch a little, and you will see.'

So I stood and watched while much boring and chiselling went forward, much hammering and blasting, and then part of the mass of rock gave way;* and I saw a heap of loose bits, not by any means alike, lying before me. Some were smooth and well-shaped, some rough and rugged: it was not hard to guess that the smooth blocks were already half-prepared, and that the rough ones would need the saw, the hammer, and the chisel, before they would be fit for use. One slab I especially noticed, which seemed all points and rough corners, as unshapely as a stone could be.†

'That,' I said, 'will be of no use at all; it has fallen among the ruins of the rock, but no

^{* 2} Cor. vi. 17.

[†] Rom. vii. 18.

one will dream of using it; it will be thrown away among the rubbish.'

But 'No,' said my friend; 'it will be used, you will see.'

And as I watched I found that he was right. The rough bit of rock was taken in hand, the sharp points were chipped off, a good square slab was cut from it—it was measured, and destined to fill a certain place; and then the polishing of the surface began.* As far as I could judge, this rough bit of stone was destined for a not insignificant place in the great Temple. I could scarcely believe it; and wondered much that, with such an abundance of stone around him, the Builder should have selected this most unpromising block, and should think it worth so much trouble and labour. I could not at all comprehend his judgment, which, as it seemed to me, rejected as useless, many well-looking bits of rock, and chose others which, in my opinion, were altogether most inferior.

^{# 2} Cor. xi. 23-28.

'Now look,' I said to my friend; 'there is a choice bit of slate stone, smooth, trim, and requiring but very little polish, why is so much time spent on the great rough slab, while this is apparently neglected? surely it will be made use of? I should have said that it was ready and prepared; but the Builder seems to care little for it.'*

'He tried it when you were not looking,'† was the reply; 'and at every stroke of the chisel it broke to pieces: it will not stand the needful dressing, and so He judges it unfit for use. Ah, yes! it may look smooth and pretty enough, but it will not wear well—no, it will not wear.'

This, then, was the explanation of what seemed so strange; and having heard this, I watched with still greater interest the work that was going forward in the quarry. The rough unshapely stone which I had noticed was gradually assuming fair proportions; but I

^{* 1} Sam. xvi. 7. † Jer. xvii. 10.

wondered much at the patience of the workmen who toiled over it. For ever and anon the chisel struck against some awkward grain in the stone, which resisted its edge; the saw, which had been used to bring it to the needful shape, had done the same; and even when the saw and chisel had done their work,* and nothing much remained to be done, I perceived that much pains were spent in the final polishing, that no unevenness or roughness might remain.†

From this quarry I passed on to visit others, where stones of other kinds were undergoing similar treatment; but in all I heard much talk of the building which was being carried on, and more still of the great stone which had been laid for the foundation of the Temple.

'There has been no such stone found in this quarry since that time,' the workmen said; 'the Master chose it Himself, and said

^{*} Acts ix. 23; 2 Cor. xi. 28. † 2 Cor. xii. 7.

that there was none other that would serve the purpose.'*

- 'It was so solid and strong,' added another of the workmen.
- 'So pure, and white, and spotless,' said another.
- 'It had no flaw in it; it was perfect,' said a fourth.
- 'Then I suppose that it needed little of all the cutting and shaping which I see going on here?' was my remark; but the workmen shook their heads.
- 'I did much to it, by the Master's orders,'† said one; 'and I too,' said another; while a third added, 'I believe we all laboured on that stone to make it fit for its place; and we proved it to be as we said, strong, perfect, and pure. You may say our pains must have been needless, but not so said our Master.‡ True, He had chosen the stone because He knew it to be fit for the foundation; but

^{*} Isa. xxviii. 16. † Isa. liii. 5. ‡ Heb. ii. 10, 18.

others were watching the building, and it was well that they, too, should be convinced that it had no flaw in it, no weak point, but that it could bear the weight of the whole building.'

'I should like to have seen that stone,' I said. 'I wonder whether I should have deemed it better than the others, or whether I should have seen no beauty in it.'

'There were many that could see nothing to be admired in it, that said they would never trust it or have anything to do with it; they raised a clamour, and would have had it cast away as worthless;* but though for a time they seemed to be carrying their point, our Master prevailed, the Temple which was being built was His alone, and it was for Him and Him alone to choose the cornerstone.'

'Of course,' I replied; and the workman continued:

^{*} Matt. xxvii. 23, 24.

'There has been a like commotion again and again since then about other stones; it has been said that this and that were not fit for such a glorious building;* that others were more fit. Many such things were said about some special stones destined by our Master to be placed near the corner-stone.† The passers-by could see nothing remarkable about them; some said they were mere common stones, in fact quite inferior in many respects. They railed against our Master for choosing them, and even said that He had not chosen them at all: that it was all a mistake, and that they would never be used for the great Temple. But they did not know-they did not know.'

'Did they not change their minds when they saw them trimmed and polished, and ready for their places in the building?'

'Some did, but many spoke against them

^{*} Acts vii. 54-57.

[†] Ephes. ii. 22.

to the end. Well, they will change their minds some day.'*

'When they see the great Temple in all its glory, you mean,' I replied; 'but do you think that it will be possible to discover each several stone in that great building? I know it will be gorgeous, and that each stone will be perfect in its way, but I should scarcely think that there will be anything noticeable about each.'

'Well, we say there will, for our Master has so ordered it that none of the stones are precisely alike; no two in all the building will be the same—at least, so we have been told.'†

'None are alike here, 'tis true; but then none are, I suppose, quite ready to leave the quarry.'

'There are some which seem to us nearly ready, but we wait our Master's orders; there may yet be some beautifying needed;

^{*} Matt. xx. 16.

^{† 1} Cor. xv. 41.

we cannot tell. Sometimes He orders the stones to be fetched away when they do not seem by any means perfect, and sometimes He leaves them here when one would say that they cannot need another touch; but we are only workmen, doing as we are bid, and oftentimes scarcely knowing why we do it.'

'But you see the reason afterwards, no doubt.'

'Sometimes, sometimes. Yes; a stone looks very well finished, but the order is given to chisel off a corner, to round an edge, and the difference is marvellous. But, as I said before, many a stone goes out of this quarry with rough corners and only half polished. I can't say what happens to them, but be sure it's all right; His hand can make perfect, and maybe He does what's wanted as He fits them into their places. The building is not finished yet, you know.'

I did know; but as I left the quarry it

was with the hope that the day was not far distant when the last stone might be ready, and the last niche filled up. Surely, surely there will be great rejoicings when that day shall come.'*

* Zech. iv. 7.

THE END.

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